



The Significant Other: a Literary History of Elves

By

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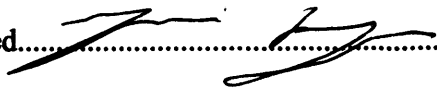
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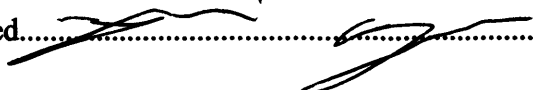
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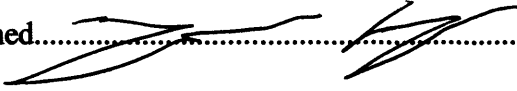
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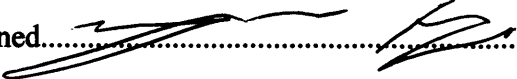
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis and literary history of the human-sized elf as a Significant Other. It argues that this character is in direct relation to humans while also situated beyond the boundaries of what is human, familiar, and 'same', and acts as a supernatural double that defines these boundaries. The initial section of the thesis (chapters 1-5) traces the development of elves in Western narratives up to the twentieth century. The first chapter relates the origin of the word 'elf' and the creature's characteristics in the Germanic regions of Europe. Chapter 2 discusses similar beings in Celtic sources and the establishment of a realm in which they dwell. The development of Faerie, primarily in French sources, is further examined in chapter 3. Chapter 4 scrutinises the application of the words 'elf' and 'fairy' to a diminutive being, here referred to as the Insignificant Other. Chapter 5 assesses the demise of the diminutive being and re-establishment of the human-sized elf. Because of his paramount influence, the central section of the thesis (chapters 6-9) is devoted to the Elves of J. R. R. Tolkien. This section begins by analysing descriptions of Tolkien's Elves in order to evaluate his debt to earlier traditions. Chapter 7 assesses the status of Elves in Middle-earth, while chapter 8 scrutinises the presentation of gender. Chapter 9 discusses the Dark-elves and their place in Tolkien's developing ideas about Elves. The final section of the thesis (chapters 10-13) examines Tolkien's influence and the current status of the elf. Chapter 10 focuses on four recent narratives that identify human-sized fairies as particularly English and homely, and the following chapter examines elves and fairies in comics and film. Chapter 12 investigates the popularity of the 'Tolkienian' elf in modern Fantasy fiction, while the final chapter locates the elf as Significant Other in contemporary popular culture and media. The thesis demonstrates that while the appearance of the human-sized elf character has changed over the centuries, it has consistently functioned as a figure that writers, artists and others have used to draw boundaries between the human and the Other and the known and unknown.

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Non cogito de me ipso ergo humanus non sum

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Introduction: What is an Elf and how is it Other?

This thesis will look at a particular character that is sometimes called elf, sometimes fairy, and sometimes something else entirely. I have chosen to name it elf because that is a word with an origin that makes it suitable to be applied to such a character, as will be seen below. It is a character that is mostly like a human but not entirely. My primary interest is in the way in which the elf figure is different from humans while still very much like them. This difference is great enough for a person to be disqualified from humanity and labelled elf, fairy or other words designating similar characters, leaving the elf figure in a liminal space between the mundane world and the magical world. The elf can be classified as among the most humanoid of fantastic beings, along with vampires, werewolves, mermaids and the like, though the elf is unique in many ways, the most evident being that it usually lacks animal features and does not in most older accounts differ in appearance from humans. The literary history of elves demonstrates a much more intimate relationship between elves and humans: the elf often appears as an otherworldly double whose purpose is to define what is human, familiar and inside culture. Commenting on the well-preserved elf-belief in Iceland, Valdimar Hafstein concludes that

We are not, however, entitled to conclude that the Otherworld is merely an extension of this one – it should rather be seen as its counterpart, circumscribing and defining the boundaries of the ‘inside’, the local human community, through its manifestation of an ‘outside’, the domain of the Other. Beyond that, the otherness of elves in the old tradition, like that of their counterparts in mainland Scandinavia, stems from their being unknown and ultimately unknowable. They are distant strangers in the very vicinity of home, living across the field from the farmhouse and yet in another world. Elves represent nature in the heart of culture; the places attributed to them are wilderness in the midst of cultivation. These places – rocks, hills, ponds – are taboo, they must not be fished in, messed with, moved or mowed; they must not, that is to say, be brought into culture.¹

Hafstein goes on to argue that the Icelandic elves are demonstrating against modernity and in protection of the traditional, agricultural way of life. This is the same development seen

¹ Valdimar Tr. Hafstein, ‘The Elves’ Point of View: Cultural Identity in Contemporary Icelandic Elf-tradition’, *Fabula* 41 (2000), 87-104 (p. 89).

elsewhere in Europe, in particular in the way the elf/fairy figure has been picked up by national romantic movements in both 'Celtic' and 'Germanic' countries as proof of cultural singularity. The elf is a generically ethnic figure: it demonstrates the genuineness of a particular culture and its connection to a specific region is usually verified by folk-tales and legends that are, however, found throughout Europe and the New World.

My particular interest in the human-sized elf, which I will call 'the Significant Other' in this thesis, is because of its similarity and vicinity to humans and recurring disqualification from humanity. Tom Shippey interprets this likeness as an argument that elves are

very hard to classify as examples of 'the Other'. Elves in fact seem to be effectively parallel and similar to humans. They live the same sort of life, carry out the same kind of activities, are affected in the same way by weather, hunger, and domestic emergencies such as childbirth. [...] The only thing that commonly though not invariably marks off the elves from humanity is their inability to become Christians, and to join society in that way.²

The word *human* makes a rather late entry into the English language. It was popularised in the sixteenth century as a term meaning 'not divine' and its use as a label that separates us from supernatural beings is very late.³ Words more commonly used were 'Christom' or 'mortal', or even more specific classifications such as 'English'. There was traditionally not a difference in species between *us* and *them*, and it is likely that species definitions came into place via Darwin.

The modern English word *elf* is of Anglo-Saxon origin but far less used than *fairy* in English-speaking countries today. The word *fairy*, derived from Old French, is now mostly considered to be the correct, and general, term for a supernatural being. However, there is a problem with how elves and fairies are supposed to be categorised: the words have been applied to a number of beings with a wide range of attributes over the years. This means that

² Tom Shippey, 'Alias Oves Habeo: the Elves as a Category Problem', in Tom Shippey, ed., *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), pp. 156-87 (pp. 166-67).

³ *Oxford English Dictionary* online version, <<http://dictionary.oed.com>> (henceforth abbreviated *OED*), sub 'human', 2.

it is impossible to say what sort of being is referred to. Furthermore, in this age of information the meanings of the words have become very personal and definitions are made according to what sources a person has consulted. I will make use of the word *elf* because it is a word of English origin and has been traditionally applied to the sort of being that is the subject of this thesis. The word *fairy* originally had a completely different meaning and was not the name of a being at all, and when it began to be applied in that way, it was mostly to a diminutive being.

An elf can be utterly different from another elf, while an elf and a fairy can sometimes be exactly the same. Characters will appear in this thesis that are in their texts referred to as elves, fairies, or altogether different words, as well as those whose ‘ethnicity’ is not made out to be different from humans at all. So what makes an elf an elf?

And I reckon there’s Elves and Elves. They’re all elvish enough, but they’re not all the same.⁴

These words come from Samwise Gamgee, most ardent admirer of elves of all of Tolkien’s Hobbits. Sam meets a number of communities of elves, but he concludes that there are some things that are generically elvish. Tolkien sums up many qualities already mentioned in earlier sources and which in modern Fantasy have become commonplace or even stock elvish traits. However, this thesis will examine the very complex and crooked route by which these traits end up in this contemporary cultural context: while some features, like immortality for example, are found in most narratives, others, like the elves’ ability to walk without making a sound, are found in only two sources; the feature of being averse to iron spreads very quickly in a particular cultural context, while the pointed ears grew out of illustrations of beings that were not elves at all. It is clear that some features have evolved due to the inability of humans to incorporate elves into their definitions of sameness, so that they have thus given elves an

⁴ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), p. 473.

increasing number of traits that clearly identify them as Others, not humans, not the same. Medieval elves and fairies have in most cases no physical features that separate them from humans at all and their immortality and magical powers are accepted as reality. This thesis will aim to investigate the ways in which the elf figure that I call the Significant Other has inhabited and continues to inhabit a liminal space on the borders of culture and society in many parts of the world.

This thesis serves to trace the development of the Significant Other in literature and other forms of fiction. It is divided into three sections. Because of his unprecedented influence, the central section of the thesis will look in detail at J. R. R. Tolkien's Elves. It is preceded by a section that recounts the earlier history of the character in literature and focuses especially on the Norse, Anglo-Saxon and Celtic material that Tolkien with which he was familiar. The final part of the thesis brings the research up to date by discussing contemporary images of the Significant Other in literature and other media, which sometimes is influenced by Tolkien and sometimes very different, but all contributing to the way we relate to the supernatural Other in our own time.

Section I

Inside the 'Ample Volume': Historical Views

Chapter 1: The Álfar and Ælfe of the Northerners and Anglo-Saxons

i. Word definitions, descriptions and classifications

Few beings have been the subject of more confusion in the cultural consciousness of Western popular culture than elves.¹ Readers of Tolkien and later Fantasy fiction will have had their perception revised, but the most common and immediate association is with diminutive Christmas elves and flower-fairies. These images are quite simplified and have little support in literary history and mythology: while there have been accounts of diminutive beings in Europe in earlier periods, I would argue that the names *elves* and *fairies* should be regarded in relation to their historical meaning.² The English word *elf* comes from the Anglo-Saxon *ælf*, plural *ælfe*, with the equivalent Old Norse word being *álfr*, plural *álfar*.³ Further derivation is unclear: the *OED* suggests Old Teutonic **albo-z*, alternatively **albi-z*, and compares it to the Sanskrit *rbhu*, a name for three genii of the seasons in Hindu mythology.⁴ There would need to be much further explanation for this derivation and how the word ended up being used in the Germanic languages for the suggestion to be plausible. Alaric Hall points out the lack of evidence for *rbhu* and instead suggests the Indo-European **albh* meaning ‘white’ and that the word originally meant ‘white one’ and denoted a being associated with light, a notion also supported by Gunnell.⁵ While *elf* and related words that designate a being mainly occur in the Germanic languages, the stem *albh* with the meaning

¹ If the word *elves* is used as the name of a being of certain physical characteristics (cf. humans, birds), then a minuscule ‘e’ would be appropriate; if *Elves* is used to signify a people with a common culture, belief and/or habits (cf. British, Christian), then a majuscule would be in place. Tolkien prefers the second definition as he places Elves in relation to other humanoids like Man (humans), Dwarves and Hobbits. In general the characters named as elves are so diverse and connected to a multitude of cultures that elves should not be indicative of a common culture, but rather a type of being, where I think the first meaning is more appropriate. *Gentry* would however be capitalised as it does indicate a certain type of appearance or behaviour of a sub-group of elves. Regarding the Norse type I will retain *Álfar* as a rule since it refers to a people corresponding to Æsir, Vanir, etc.

² For the meaning of *fairy*, see next chapter.

³ *OED* sub ‘elf’.

⁴ *OED* sub ‘elf’.

⁵ Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity* (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2007), pp. 54-55; Terry Gunnell, ‘How Elvish were the Álfar?’, in Andrew Wawn, ed., *Constructing Nations, Reconstructing Myths: Essays in Honour of T. A. Shippey* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 111-30 (p. 122).

‘white’ is widespread in Europe, in part because of the Latin reflex *albus*. *Albus* is translated as ‘properly *dead* white, not shining’, and ‘*Pale*, from sickness, terror, care, and the like’,⁶ and is suggested by Jacob Grimm as the origin of *elf*:

Probably then *albs* meant first of all a light-coloured, white, good spirit, so that, when *âlfar* and *dvergar* are contrasted, the one signifies the white spirits, the other black. This exactly agrees with the great beauty and brightness of *âlfar*.⁷

The problem of defining the meaning of *elf* is due to the amount of similar words existing in the Germanic languages which in their cultural context signify a variety of different beings: the similar word-structure then invites for conflation of this variety, a translation of all words as *elf*, and a tendency to see a continuity of a Germanic core-elf. The *OED* defines *elf* as ‘a class of supernatural beings, in early Teutonic belief supposed to possess formidable magical powers, exercised variously for the benefit or the injury of mankind’;⁸ the mention of *a class* here is curious, as elves are described as ‘dwarfish’ as a general characteristic.⁹ In the English language the appropriate word seems to be *fairy*, despite this being a borrowing from the French and popularised as late as the Elizabethan era, mainly by its use by Shakespeare and Spenser. The modern English word *elf* is now mostly applied to a dwarvish being that is inferior to fairies, often considered to be Scandinavian rather than British, although it has been preferred over *fairy* in Scotland and applied to the human-sized sort, as for example in the ballads discussed in chapter I.3.¹⁰

This thesis will consider the human-sized elf as a kind of Other: this does not mean that I argue that this is the correct interpretation of *elf* or even that it is the only sort that

⁶ Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955) *sub* ‘albus’. For a fuller account of the linguistic development of *elf*, see Hall, pp. 176-81; Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, James Steven Stallybrass, trans., 4 vols (New York: Dover, 1966), II: 442; Heather Stuart, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Elf’, *Studia Neophilologica* 48.2 (1976), 313-20 (p. 314).

⁷ Grimm, II: 444.

⁸ *OED sub* ‘elf’, 1.a.

⁹ *OED sub* ‘elf’, 1.a.

¹⁰ *OED sub* ‘elf’, 1.b. and 3. Katharine Briggs, *A Dictionary of Fairies* (London: Allen Lane, 1976) *sub* ‘elves’. This notion is also presented in Jorge Luis Borges, *The Book of Imaginary Beings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 58.

exists. Elf-belief has always been rooted in social and cultural context and has in the present day become increasingly personal. The definitions of elf and fairy have therefore become significantly wide and varied, and some distinction has to be made to identify the subject of this thesis from a number of other beings. ‘The Significant Other’ in the context of this thesis denotes a being who is much like a human but inhuman enough to have specific words applied to it that separate it from the Same, that which is within the known social context and is surprisingly seldom called human in a historical perspective. For this purpose of making this separation, I will make use of W. Y. Evans-Wentz’s table of nature-spirits:

1. Angelic beings, Tuatha De Danann, or Gentry-type.
2. Demonic beings, fallen angels.
3. Elementals, diminutive or dwarfish nature-spirits.
4. Souls of the dead, ghosts.¹¹

Evans-Wentz uses the term *Gentry-type* to refer to beings with physical proportions and behaviour corresponding to the human, that is, human-sized elves and fairies.¹² This is the term I will employ henceforth to identify elves and fairies that could fit into the description ‘the Significant Other’. The word *Gentry* suggests a people of equal or somewhat superior position that deserves respect. It also suggests landowning (having their own land, e.g. Faerie, Elfland, Tir Na nOg, Annwn, Avalon); the Gentry are then not outcasts from human society but have their own. The word is an Anglo-Irish euphemism that refers to human-sized *sidhe*, and might derive from the expression ‘gentle bush’ for a type of thorn, possibly because it flowers around May Day when the *sidhe* ride out.¹³ Other possible names that might be used for human-sized elves are *liosálfar* or *huldufolk* (mediaeval and modern Icelandic respectively), *Tuatha De Danann* or *sidhe* (mediaeval and modern Irish). I will use *Gentry* as it is descriptive of the appearance, estate and behaviour of this type of being, and because it is

¹¹ After W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Fairy-faith in Celtic Countries* [1911] (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1999), pp. 240-41.

¹² Evans-Wentz, p. 67.

¹³ *OED* sub ‘gentry’, 2.b. See also W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight* [1893] in *Mythologies* (London: MacMillan, 1962), pp. 5-141 (pp. 5, 70-71).

an English word that may be used in a more general way than the above-mentioned culturally bound ones. The Gentry-type of elf appears as a rule well-dressed, good-looking and equipped with great palaces and possessions. The reference to the human social class Gentry is also appropriate with regards to the position of elves in the spirit-world, in the Northern lands somewhat below the Æsir, or demi-gods such as the Tuatha De Danann in Ireland.¹⁴ Other descriptive names of elves on the British Isles are Gentle Folk, People of Peace, and Hidden People.¹⁵ These euphemisms might have occurred for one of two reasons, or possibly both: the people themselves would not reveal their real name as this would give humans power over them, and/or secondly, it was considered unlucky in the Celtic areas to say the word fairy, and they were consequently sometimes called ‘them,’ ‘themselves,’ or ‘them people.’¹⁶

ii. *Elves as Others*

The Gentry-type of elf can be identified as the Significant Other because it is at once very much like a human, but, as will be demonstrated throughout the thesis, continually ‘disqualified’ from humanity. It is common in folkloristic accounts to point out their similarities to humans in that they occupy themselves with the same kind of tasks common in rural communities, marry, have children, and so on.¹⁷ The problem is that elves do not generally have any outstanding physical features that would be reason to readily separate them from humans: pointed ears and the like are very late features. How, then, would humans

¹⁴ ‘They were called the Tuatha De; that is, they considered their men of learning to be gods, and their husbandmen non-gods, so much was their power in every art and every druidic occultism besides.’ R. A. Stewart Macalister, and John Mac Neill, trans and eds, *Leabhar Gabhála: The Book of Conquests of Ireland. The Recension of Micheál Ó Cléirigh, part 1*. (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Company, 1916), p. 143.

¹⁵ Katharine Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 146, 147 and 149. *Hidden Folk*, cf. Icelandic *Huldufolk*, the Norwegian and Danish *Huldre* and the Swedish *Huldra*. The name pertains to an underground people, also sometimes described as subterranean people or people of the hills, i.e. *Sidhe*, ‘hill-dwellers.’ Briggs, *Fairies in Tradition*, p. 147. For more examples of names, see Evans-Wentz, pp. 22, 274, 293 and 307.

¹⁶ Evans-Wentz, p. 274; ‘them,’ etc., see Evans-Wentz pp. 82, 117 and 182.

¹⁷ See for example John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx, vol. I* [1901] (London: Wildwood House, 1980), p. 83.

know to identify them? The main reason is arguably that they are in some way outlandish: they would perhaps dress, act or speak in a way that identifies them as strangers. In a rural community, suspicion towards outsiders would be expected, and invaders of the safe realm of the community might be attributed with evil powers, and made non-human. The issue of whether these Others were just foreigners or supernatural beings is less important than why this process occurred in the first place. As John Lindow comments,

I would like to suggest that wholesale creation and maintenance of ‘other’ groups, such as supernatural beings, offer a means for the ‘inside’ social group, i.e. that group composed of the tradition participants, to define itself.¹⁸

As the thesis will go on to demonstrate, this attitude has changed over time: there is a tendency for the elf to become more malignant, and also smaller, over time. This process follows the spread of Imperialism and with it the idea that the Other can be dominated, belittled and ridiculed as well as feared for its differences. This is the main reason why I separate the human-sized *Significant Other* from the smaller and less equal *Insignificant Other*: a being of equal or bigger stature than what is normal for a human would signify that the being is more important than if it was smaller than a human.¹⁹ A human-sized elf can be faced at eye level, so that a meeting between a human and an elf would be one of equals. A meeting between an elf and a human of opposite sex would also facilitate sexual relations and cross-breeding, which would motivate such a meeting. Yet another reason for a meeting to take place is that elves are generally rich, and a Chosen One may benefit from their generosity by proving himself worthy, a reoccurring theme in narratives featuring the Gentry-type.

iii. Norse Álfar

As pointed out above, there are in general no distinguishing features mentioned of elves in

¹⁸ John Lindow, ‘Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others: A Millennium of World View’, *Scandinavian Studies* 67 (1995), 8-31 (p. 18).

¹⁹ Briggs, *Fairies in Tradition*, p. 65.

folk narratives, which does lead to the question of what they look like. The problem is that very little is known about the earliest Germanic sorts, the Norse Álfar and the Anglo-Saxon *Ælfe*. There are three sorts of Álfar mentioned in Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* which Jacob Grimm outlines as

1. Liosálfar ('huldufolk')²⁰
2. Döckálfar ('genii obscuri')²¹
3. Svartálfar ('dvergar')²²

Alternatively, 'a *white*, a *pale*, and a *black* troop'.²³

Grimm disagrees with Snorri's clearly Christian-influenced division into either dark or light (that is, claiming that Döckálfar, Svartálfar and Dvergar were the same thing). Snorri's statement is that

There is one place that is called Alfheim. There live the folk called light-elves, but dark-elves live down in the ground, and they are unlike them in appearance, and even more in nature. Light-elves are fairer than the sun to look at, but dark elves are blacker than pitch.²⁴

Grimm concludes from this passage that

ought we not rather to assume three kinds of Norse genii, *liosálfar*, *döckálfar*, *svartálfar*? No doubt I am therefore pronouncing Snorri's statement fallacious: 'döckálfar eru svartari en bik (pitch)'.²⁵

The term *Döckálfar* also presents another problem. If *Svartálfar* should, for the moment, be defined as not elves according to the definition of the word in relation to *alph*, then there would still have to be a difference made between the pale and the light troop. Grundtvig seems to support Grimm's argument of three kinds of Álfar but in contrast to Grimm, it is the

²⁰ Grimm, II: 456.

²¹ Grimm, II: 444.

²² Grimm, II: 445.

²³ Grimm, II: 446.

²⁴ Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. and ed. Anthony Faulkes (London: J. M. Dent, 1995). pp. 19-20. 'Sá er einn staðr þar er kallaðr Álfheimr. Þar byggvir fólk þat er ljósálfar heita, en döckálfar búa niðri í jörðu, ok eru þeir ólíkir þeim sýnum en myklu ólíkari reyndum. Ljósálfar eru fegri en sól sýnum, en döckálfar eru svartari en bik.' Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 19.

²⁵ Grimm, II: 445.

Dökkálfar that Grundtvig identifies as dwarves:

Elves were the angels of the old North, and Dwarfs only a middle-kind of them: neither light-elves nor dark-elves, but so to speak twilight-elves.²⁶

Grundtvig then insists that there were light-elves and dark-elves as polar opposites and suggests that all of the Álfar were of dwarvish stature.²⁷ The problem with Grundtvig, Grimm, and most other nineteenth century writers on folklore, is that they tend to project their contemporary appreciation of beings onto the beliefs of the past. Considering that the context in which they were writing was the time when the Other, in this case women, non-whites, and the poor, were the most oppressed and beings like elves and fairies were the smallest, their statements concerning older beliefs should be taken with a great heap of salt. In this matter it seems more reasonable to go with what Snorri seems to be saying, which is that *Svartálfar* were dwarves, since dwarves were native of Svartálfheim, as discussed below. The problem of Dökkálfar still remains: Grimm proposes to translate the word as *genii obscuri*, obscure spirits. The original meaning of the words *dökkr* in Old Norse and *deorc* in Old English is *hidden*, which would correspond to the modern Icelandic word for the Gentry-type of elf, *Huldufolk*.²⁸ *Deorc* is the origin of the modern English word *dark*, which then originally was not another word for black, then, and not the opposite of light. The common word for black in Old Norse is *svartr*, which in describing appearances meant swarthy; that is, having black hair and dark eyes.²⁹ *Svartr* was applied to Scandinavians and *skrælingar*, Inuits and/or Native Americans, while another word for black, *blár*, was used for people with

²⁶ My trans. 'Alfer var det gamle Nordens Engle, og Dværgene kun et Mellem-Slags af dem: hverken Lys-Alfer eller Mørk-Alfer, men saa at sige Skumrings-Alfer.' N. F. S. Grundtvig, *Nordens Mythologi*, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen: J. H. Schubothes Boghandling, 1832). Accessed from *Arkiv for Dansk Litteratur*, <http://www.adl.dk/adl_pub/vaerker/cv/e_vaerk/e_vaerk.xsql?ff_id=31&id=12629&hist=N&nnoc=>>, 12 February 2008.

²⁷ 'For Resten er det meget rimeligt, at de Gamle har forestillet sig alle Alferne smaa, ligesom vi helst give Englene Barne-Skikkelse, og da "Dværg" er det Nordiske Udtryk for Alt hvad der i voxen Alder seer ud som Børn, kan det naturlig ogsaa have givet Anledning til stundum at kalde de egenlige Alfer Dværg.' Grundtvig, *ibid*.

²⁸ Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921) *sub* 'deorc'.

²⁹ Lindow, 'Supernatural Others', p. 13.

black skin.³⁰ *Svartálfar* were then swarthy of appearance, but not black of skin, despite Snorri's description of them as 'blacker than pitch'. The terms *Svartálfar* and *Dökkálfar* are mentioned in both of the Eddas, although never in the same place. In Snorri's 'Gylfaginning,' Odin sends Skirnir, a servant of Freyr, to Svartálfaheim to collect some fetters made by the Dvergar,³¹ and in 'Skaldskaparmál' Loki is sent there and comes across the Dvergr Andvari.³² from this Tom Shippey concludes that Svartálfr means Dvergr.³³ Yet more confusion is caused by the first individual identified as an Álf in 'Hávamál' in the *Poetic Edda*:

Odin for the Æsir, and Dain for the elves,
Dvalin for the dwarfs,
Asvid for the giants,
I myself carved some.³⁴

Dain is furthermore mentioned as a Dvergr in 'Hyndlulíód,' where Freyja says she has been given a golden boar by 'those skilful dwarfs,/Dain and Nabbi'.³⁵ Dain and Dvalin are again mentioned in Snorri's version of 'Dvergatal,' but Dain seems to have been omitted in the older version of the tally of the dwarves in 'Völuspá' in the *Poetic Edda*, where Dvalin is listed along with Álf, Gandálfr and Vindálfr (Elf, Staff-elf and Wind-elf, all of whom are dwarves).³⁶ The word *dáinn* literally means dead, which might contribute to the identification

³⁰ Lindow, 'Supernatural Others', p. 13.

³¹ Snorri (1995), p. 28.

³² Snorri (1995), p. 100.

³³ Tom Shippey, 'Light-elves, Dark-elves, and Others: Tolkien's Elvish Problem,' *Tolkien Studies* 1 (2004), 1-15 (p. 4).

³⁴ Carolyne Larrington, trans, *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 35.

'Óðinn með ásom, en fyr álfom Dáinn,

Dvalinn dvergom fyrir,

Ásviðr iqtum fyrir,

Ek reist sialfr sumar.' Gustav Neckel, *Edda: die Lieder des Codex Regius Nebst Verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1936), p. 40.

³⁵ Larrington, p. 254. 'er mér hagir gærðo/dvergar tveir/Dáinn ok Nabbi'. Neckel, p. 285.

³⁶ Larrington, pp. 5-6 (verse 11-16). 'Dvergatal' is the origin of most of the dwarf names in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), pp. 8-11. The names are literally interpreted in most translations - see Neckel, pp. 3-4, for the Old Norse forms.

of the ‘subterranean’ people (elves, dark-elves, or dwarves) as spirits of the dead.³⁷ There still remains the question of a possible division between elves of light (*Liosálfar*) and elves of pallor (*Döckálfar*). Grimm does not offer a single category of the spirits of the dead, but his interpretation of *Döckálfar* as the pale troop might justify situating ghostly apparitions under that name. The Dvergjar are described as living in the earth in both Eddas, though elves are in most cases also said to live below the ground, in hills or mountains, or having the opening or portal to their domain there. Shippey notes that conflicting evidence for these beings as well as their conflation might be due to ‘accidents of selective transmission’.³⁸

The *Liosálfar*, then, are by Snorri Sturluson described as being fairer than the sun,³⁹ while *Álfröðull*, ‘elf-beam’, was a kenning for the sun in skaldic and Eddaic verse.⁴⁰ The domain of the *Liosálfar* is in Snorri’s ‘Gylfaginning’ located in Viðbláinn (‘Wide-blue’), the third heaven, probably related to his interpretation of them as angelic:

High said: ‘They say there is another heaven south of and above this heaven of ours, and that heaven is called Andlang; and that there is a third heaven still further above that one, and that is called Vidblain, and it is in that heaven that we believe this place to be. But we believe it is only light-elves that inhabit these places for the time being.’⁴¹

As cited above, Snorri also gives *Álfheim* as the dwelling-place of the *Liosálfar*. In ‘Grimnismál’ in the *Poetic Edda*, their master is mentioned as Freyr, who was given the domain as a gift upon losing his first tooth.⁴² *Álfar* are frequently mentioned alongside the *Æsir* in the *Poetic Edda* although the second-highest group under the *Æsir* is the *Vanir*, which Alaric Hall considers a valid reason to interpret *Vanr* and *Álfr* as synonyms:

³⁷ Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875) *sub* *Dáinn*’.

³⁸ Tom Shippey, ‘Afterword: A Chair, A Sock, and Language’, in Tom Shippey, ed., *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm’s Mythology of the Monstrous* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), pp. 379-88 (p. 382).

³⁹ Snorri (1995), p. 19.

⁴⁰ Hall, p. 30; Snorri (1995), p. 90. Cleasby and Vigfusson *sub* ‘Álfr’ (‘álfröðull’).

⁴¹ Snorri (1995), p. 20. ‘Hár segir: “Svá er sagt at annarr himinn sé suðr ok upp frá þessum himni, ok heitir sá himinn Andlangr, en hinn þriði himinn sé enn upp frá þeim ok heitir sá Viðbláinn, ok á þeim himni hyggjum vér þenna stað vara. En ljósálfar einir hyggjum vér at nú byggvi þá staði.”’ Snorri (1982), p. 20.

⁴² Larrington, p. 52.

vanr is a rare word in Norse and unattested elsewhere in the Germanic languages, whereas álfr is well attested, widespread and with a range of clear Indo-European cognates.⁴³

The Vanir are identified as Njörðr, the god of the wind and the sea, and his children, the fertility-deities Freyr and Freyja. Njörðr is married to the giantess Skadi, but Freyr and Freyja's mother is Njörðr's unnamed sister. In 'Lokasenna' ('Loki's Quarrel'), Loki gets into a drunken rage and speaks candidly about the gathered host of Æsir and Vanir/Álfar. To Freyja he says

Be silent, Freyja, I know all about you;
You aren't lacking in blame:
Of all the Æsir and the elves, who are in here,
Each one has been your lover.⁴⁴

The next statement from Loki indicates that Freyja has had sex with Freyr, on which Larrington comments that

Freyja's affair with her brother is not mentioned elsewhere, but the fact that Niord seems to have fathered her and Freyr⁴⁵ on his sister suggests that brother-sister sexual relations were a distinguishing characteristic of the Vanir.⁴⁶

Hall suggests that Vanr might just be another word for Álfr, since the 'Lokasenna' verse first suggests that Freyja has had sex with Álfar and then with Freyr.⁴⁷ The problem remains that Vanr and Álfr are different words, sometimes used to describe different peoples, for example in 'Alvíssmál', as Hall goes on to point out. I would suggest that Álfar may be the name of a people, while vanir would be the name of their rulers, Njörðr, Freyr and Freyja. Grimm, however, is adamant that

⁴³ Hall, p. 27.

⁴⁴ Larrington, p. 90. 'Þegi þú, Freyja! Þik kann ek fullgørva:
era þer vamma vant:

ása ok álfa, er hér inni ero,
hverr hefir þinn hór verit.' Neckel, p. 99.

⁴⁵ In verse 36, Larrington, p. 91, Neckel, p. 100.

⁴⁶ Larrington, p. 276.

⁴⁷ Hall, p. 36.

an elf comes as much short of human size as a giant towers above it. All elves are imagined as small and tiny, but the *light* ones as well-formed and symmetrical, the *black* as ugly and misshapen.⁴⁸

In relation to the statements made by Loki, this would conjure a somewhat comic vision if we were to imagine that Freyja would attempt to have sex with a diminutive being. From ‘Lokasenna’ we must conclude then that the Álfar mentioned are of relatively equal stature to the Vanir and the Æsir, for practical purposes.

Álfr is also sometimes given as a kenning for a human man, where it would be a positive epithet. Snorri recommends to poets in ‘Skáldskaparmál’ that

It is also normal to refer to a man using all the names of the Æsir. Names of giants are also used, and this is mostly as satire or criticism. Using names of elves is thought complimentary.⁴⁹

In compliance with Snorri’s advice, kennings including supernatural beings like *álfr*, *dvergr*, *jötunn*, *mara* and *burs* to signify human men are commonly found in skaldic verse.⁵⁰ Hall notes that

Perhaps because álfr never actually denotes an álfr in skaldic verse, this corpus has been little used as evidence of álfr’s early meanings.⁵¹

He considers the fact that *álfr* is used as a kenning for human man as support for them being

something mythologically close enough to human males to be used as a generic element in kennings for them, and something close enough to *áss* to share this usage with it distinctively among words for supernatural beings.⁵²

iv. *Völundr*

So far it can be concluded from Norse sources that álfr means a semi-divine and clearly non-human being, but there is one character that throws this into question: Völundr the smith is mentioned as an álfr no less than four times in the *Poetic Edda*, where he has his own verse,

⁴⁸ Grimm, II: 449.

⁴⁹ Snorri (1995), p. 94.

⁵⁰ Hall, p. 29.

⁵¹ Hall, p. 28.

⁵² Hall, p. 29.

‘Völundarkviða’. It is usually considered to be a heroic poem rather than mythological although this is debated: Kaaren Grimstad gives Völundr’s identification as an Álf as the reason for including the poem in the mythological section of the *Poetic Edda*.⁵³ Ármann Jakobsson notes that while the poem has been extensively studied, Völundr’s elvishness is usually ignored, and he instead sees the fact that ‘Völundarkviða’ provides a named character identified as an álf as an opportunity to investigate what it meant.⁵⁴ However, a straightforward identification of Völundr as an elf is hampered by the fact that he has two brothers called Slagfiðr and Egill who appear to be quite human. All three are, however, mentioned as ‘synir Finna konungs.’⁵⁵ ‘Finnr’ was a general name of a people in northern Scandinavia, most often translated as Saami (or Lapps), but also attributed to people from present-day Finland and ethnic Scandinavians who had migrated north.⁵⁶ ‘Völundarkviða’ features three brothers because of the inclusion of three swan-maidens in the first part of the story, while an earlier version of Völundr’s backstory in the *Þiðrekssaga* (discussed below), and all other accounts feature only two, Völundr and Egill. The first episode where the brothers marry the swan maidens is originally a separate folk tale: stories of supernatural wives remained popular in folk traditions, and a similar swan maiden narrative, in which the maiden is the one identified as an elf, was recorded in southern Sweden in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁷ Bereft of their supernatural wives, Slagfiðr and Egill do what would might be expected and set out to look for them, while Völundr stays at home, waiting for his wife Hervor Alvítr.⁵⁸ At

⁵³ Ármann Jakobsson, ‘The Extreme Emotional Life of Völundr the Elf’, *Scandinavian Studies* 78 (2006), 227-54 (p. 227); Kaaren Grimstad in Edward R. Haymes and Susann T. Samples, *Heroic Legends of the North: An Introduction to the Nibelung and Dietrich Cycles* (New York and London: Garland, 1996), p. 64.

⁵⁴ Ármann Jakobsson, p. 229.

⁵⁵ Ursula Dronke, *The Poetic Edda, vol. II: Mythological Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 243.

⁵⁶ Lindow, ‘Supernatural Others’, p. 11.

⁵⁷ Herman Hofberg, *Svenska Folksägner* (Stockholm: Niloe, 1882), pp. 27-29, comments, pp. 203-4.

⁵⁸ *Alvítr* is a rare word that can be translated as ‘foreign’ or ‘strange’; see Dronke, pp. 246, 255 and 302-4; Larrington, p. 104.

this point the second element of the story begins: Niðuð, king of the Niárar,⁵⁹ had heard of Vqlundr's skill as a smith and decides to kidnap him. Vqlundr is hamstrung and put on an island to smith treasures for the king. He bides his time and plots his revenge, which is finally realised when he kills the king's two young sons and rapes his daughter, Bqðvildr. At the end of the poem, Vqlundr inexplicably grows wings and flies off to mock Niðuð from the sky.

The question raised by 'Vqlundarkviða' is if Álfir should be taken to mean that Vqlundr is ethnically a supernatural being and his brothers are not, or if 'prince of Elves' and 'ruler of Elves' should be seen as kennings. Vqlundr is described as 'the most skilful of men, that men knew of, in the ancient stories',⁶⁰ which might mean that 'the elvish smith' was a saying that meant 'the best smith ever'. Vqlundr is mentioned as a *maðr*, man, which, as Lindow points out, designates a male person who might not necessarily be *mennskir*, 'human'.⁶¹ Vqlundr's Otherness may be explained by his location: as a 'Finnur' he would represent a people of wild and unknowable disposition, hinted to in the mentions of him as 'the weather-eyed shooter',⁶² and that 'He is not very gentle, this one who came out of the forest'.⁶³ Physical descriptions of Vqlundr are sparse in 'Vqlundarkviða', but we are informed that Alvitr 'wound her arms around the white neck of Volund'.⁶⁴ Vqlundr then has fair skin and is of the same size as his wife. Niðuð's queen does not like the look of Vqlundr, and says that 'similar are his eyes to a shining serpent',⁶⁵ which seems to mean that the queen thinks that Vqlundr has snake-like eyes. Slanted eyes are a common feature of elves in later popular illustrations, among other animalistic features, and the comment would make

⁵⁹ Corresponding to the present-day province of Närke in mid-Sweden.

⁶⁰ Larrington, p. 102.

⁶¹ Dronke, p. 243; Lindow, 'Supernatural Others', p. 15.

⁶² Larrington, p. 104.

⁶³ Larrington, p. 104.

⁶⁴ Larrington, p. 103.

⁶⁵ Larrington, p. 105.

Vǫlundr the first slanted-eyed elf in literature.⁶⁶ He is twice referred to as *vísi álfa* and once as *álfa lióði*, which Larrington translates as lord of elves and prince of elves respectively.

Vǫlundr, then, commands the elves, which does not necessarily mean that he is one himself.

If Vǫlundr is the master of the elves, then should he not keep that secret and use his power when his need is dire? Niðuð knows that he is a master or prince of elves: does he then expect Vǫlundr to call on the elves when he is being maltreated?

v. *Vidga*

The meaning of Vǫlundr's name also supports his identification as a generally good character. Cleasby and Vigfusson give the name Vǫlundr as the origin of the modern English word *gallant*, via the French *gallant*, an adaptation of the Old French *wala*, good, found in Old High German as *wellan*.⁶⁷ It is found in Old English as *wel*, also used as a prefix for things that are good, the stem being conserved in modern English in the word *well*.⁶⁸

Vǫlundr/Veland/Wayland should then mean 'good man' or 'one who is good,' setting him up as a role model despite having murdered two young boys and raped a girl: his actions are justified by the fact that he has been slighted by Niðuð and is thereby entitled to take his revenge on the king's children. When the figure of Vǫlundr appears in the Old English poems like *Beowulf*, *Deor*, *Waldere* and *Widsith*, he is not described as an elf, but as the best of smiths. His son with Bǫðvildr is now part of the narrative, and named Vidga, Viðga, Widia, Witege, Witege and many other similar varieties.⁶⁹ In Icelandic, *vitki* means prophet or wise man, and the Old English *wita* indicates as 'one who knows, a person of understanding or

⁶⁶ See in particular chapter 11 for this.

⁶⁷ Cleasby and Vigfusson *sub* 'Völundr'; Paul Robert, *Dictionnaire Alphabétique et Analogique de la Langue Française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), *sub* 'Galant'.

⁶⁸ Bosworth and Toller *sub* 'Wéland'. For more on this etymology, see Grimm, I: 216 n1.

⁶⁹ Again, Grimm expands on the names of Vadi, Veland and Vidga, II: 376-78.

learning, a wise man', and *wîtegian*, 'to prophesy'.⁷⁰ Vidga, then, is a 'wise man' rather than a 'good man': in the *Þiðrekssaga* he is proud and haughty and has a will to outsmart and outdo his comrades, even his master Þiðrek, and according to Haymes and Samples, 'typecast as the disloyal warrior who betrays his lord'.⁷¹ Although he is not mentioned as an elf here, I will elaborate on his story because there are strong reasons to believe that the omission of elvish references is a late development, perhaps even made in the earliest manuscript from thirteenth century Norway. Vidga is based on a Gothic hero called Vidigoia, mentioned by the Gothic historian Jordanes, and the Vidga who appears in the *Þiðrekssaga* is a conflation between the mythological Vidigoia and a later Ostrogoth king called Vitiges, named after the hero.⁷² *Þiðrekssaga* offers this physical description:

He had white hair like the flower called the lily, and it was thick and fell in great curls. His hair and his face and all of his body were bright and white as snow. His eyes were penetrating, so that one could scarcely look at him when he was angry. One could not call him long-faced or broad-faced, because everything was well-proportioned and still large and fair and hardy in all respects, but when he became angry, his face became red as blood and grim. He was the tallest of men who were not considered giants; his shoulders were large, both thick and broad; he was moderately slender and his limbs were the best shaped of any man. [...] Vidga the strong had all of his equipment white in colour; shield, saddle, surcoat, banner and helmet-cover. His shield was marked with red paint in the shape of a hammer and tongs. There are three carbuncle-stones in his shield.⁷³

This formulation gives reason to again associate the family with whiteness, even to identify

Vidga as an albino, and brings with it curious parallels with Gwyn ap Nudd, the Welsh king

⁷⁰ Cleasby and Vigfusson *sub* 'vitki'; Bosworth and Toller *sub* 'wita', *sub* 'wîtegian'.

⁷¹ Haymes and Samples, p. 158.

⁷² Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, trans. Charles C. Mierow (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1908). Accessed from *Romans Online*, <http://www.romansonline.com/Src_Frame.asp?DocID=Gth_Goth_34>, 4 July 2008; see also F. E. Sandbach, *The Heroic Saga-cycle of Dietrich of Bern* (London: David Nutt, 1906), pp. 60-61.

⁷³ Edward R. Haymes, trans., *The Saga of Thidrek of Bern* (New York & London: Garland, 1988), p. 112. 'hann [hafði huit har sem gras þat er lilia heitir. oc þyct oc liðaðiz allt i stora locka. oc sit har hæuir hann oc biart andlit. oc allan likum hæuir hann hvitan [sem sneo. Hans eugu uoro snor. sua at uarla mallti i gegn sea ef hann var reiðr. [en ængi maðr ma hann langleitan kalla ne breiðleitan. firir þui at allt var vid sic hans andlit. oc var þo mikit oc at ollu fagrt oc harðlikt. oc þa er hann var reiðr uar hans andlit raut sem bloð oc grimlikt. Hann var allra manns þeirra hæstri sem ægi uoro risar kallaði. hærðimikill. bæði þyckr oc breiðr. miðmeor oc allra manna bæzt limaðr. [...] Viðga enn serki hafði alla herneskiu huita at lit. skiold. sauðul. vapnrock. merki. hialmhautt. er markat hans skilldi með rauðum steini hamarr oc tong. oc i þeim skilldi eru .iii. karbunluli steinar.' C. R. Unger, ed., *Saga Didriks Konungs af Bern* (Oslo: Feilberg & Landmarks Forlag, 1853), p. 175.

of the Tylwyth Teg, discussed in the next chapter. Although Vidga is not mentioned as an elf, his appearance does imply the same kind of spectral whiteness.

One possible reference of Vidga as an elf is in Lazamon's *Brut*, where a certain elvish smith by name Wygar is said to have made king Arthur's mailcoat:

þa he hafde al iset,	and al hit isemed,
þa dude he on his burne	ibroide of stele
þa makede on aluisc smið	mid aðelen his crafte;
he wes ihaten Wygar	þe Witeze wurthe. ⁷⁴

The meaning of the phrase 'þe Witeze wurthe' has not been made clear. This is the translation offered by Rosamund Allen:

When he had stationed them all and all were surveyed
then he put on his mail-coat fashioned from steel mesh
Which an elvish smith had made with his excellent skill:
It was called Wygar which Wiseman had smithied.⁷⁵

Allen interprets Wygar as the name of the mail-coat and not the smith. In the note she offers several alternative translations:

Witeze could be an adj. referring to Wygar 'the skilful smith'. The line therefore may mean: (a) "he (the smith) was called Wigar (*sic*), who made Witeze"; (b) "he was called Wygar the skilful smith"; (c) "it was called Wygar which Witeze made"; Brook and his translation interpret according to (c); Madden suggests that a confused recollection of Wayland the Smith lies at the back of line 10545, and D&W derive Witeze from Widia, son of Wayland the Smith, but not himself a smith.⁷⁶

Since Norse and Anglo-Saxon poetry is not exactly rife with elvish smiths it seems reasonable to argue that Wygar is another variation of Vǫlundr, who in the *Þiðrekssaga* is known as Velent in the Norwegian manuscript (c.1200) and Veland in the Swedish copy (c.1500), and who is in modern English is known as Wayland the Smith. If this is so, then the above phrase should be translated 'he was called Wygar, who made Witeze', *made* being an unromantic synonym for *fathered*. Given that Lazamon goes on to mention Arthur's sword

⁷⁴ Lazamon, *Lazamon's Arthur*, ed. and trans. W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg (Harlow: Longman, 1991), p. 66. Barron and Weinberg do not translate the phrase at all.

⁷⁵ Lawman, *Brut*, trans. Rosamund Allen (London: Dent, 1992), ll.10542-10545, p. 270.

⁷⁶ Lawman, pp. 446-47. D&W are B. Dickins and R. M. Wilson, eds, *Early Middle English Texts* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1951).

Caliburn (Excalibur), which was made in Avalon, and that Avalon at the time was populated by elves (as the word fairy had not yet been imported around 1200), it seems reasonable to think that Wygar (Veland) and Witege (Vidga) were elves who might or might not be native to Avalon.⁷⁷

There is however an elf mentioned in the *Piðrekssaga* whose characterisation might explain why Veland and Vidga are not identified as elves. The elf in question is unnamed and sneaky: his only contribution to the story is that he gets the queen of King Aldrian of Niflungaland drunk and rapes her, fathering the son Högni. The lad soon discovers that he is different from other children as when he catches sight of his own reflection in a pond he sees that

his face was as white as the inner bark of a lime tree and as pale as ashes and that he was large, frightening, and grim.⁷⁸

The elf-related episode is the preamble to the introduction of Theodoric's knights, as Högni goes on to be one of them. The description of Högni is not all that different from that of Vidga, but it is clear that the former is a much lesser man: Högni is bullied by the other knights for being half-elvish as this makes him particularly useless. From this we can discern that at the time and place of the recording of the saga, *elf* had such negative connotations and it was deemed unsuitable for such outstanding characters as Veland and Vidga to be elves.

Due to the late date of the transcription of the saga, it is hard to tell how much elvish influence there was in earlier versions. An interesting clue is in a short verse in Middle English considered to be a fragment of the lost *Tale of Wade* (Vadi, father of Veland), hidden away in a Latin homily from c.1300:

Summe sende ylves & summe sende nadderes,
Summe sende nikeres the biden watez wunien.
Nister man nenne bute ildebrand onne.

⁷⁷ See for example ll. 9608, 14278 and 14291 for references to elves.

⁷⁸ Haymes., *Thidrek of Bern*, p. 110.

Some are elves and some are adders,
 Some are necks that dwell near the water.
 None is a man but Hildebrand alone.⁷⁹

There is no modern English equivalent to *niker*, but the *neck* or *näck* is a demonic merman found in Scandinavian folklore. The word might refer to Vadi's own family, as his mother was a mermaid.

vi. Anglo-Saxon *Ælfe*

The same procedure seems to have been in place in the recording of *Beowulf*: Weland is for example mentioned as having produced Beowulf's mailcoat, but he is no elf.⁸⁰ It is clear early on in the poem that *elf* did not have positive connotations:

Cain got no good from committing that murder
 Because the Almighty made him anathema,
 And out of the curse of his exile there sprang
 Ogres and elves and evil phantoms
 And the giants too who strove with God
 Time and again until He gave them their reward.⁸¹

Because the elves are here identified as demonic, it would be inappropriate to name Weland as one of them. Anglo-Saxon *ælf*e were probably of human size but mostly invisible. They

⁷⁹ Karl P. Wentersdorf, 'Chaucer and the Lost Tale of Wade', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 65 (1966), 274-286 (p. 279). Translation adapted from Wentersdorf's. R. M. Wilson's much different translation does not imply any supernatural status of the characters of the *Þiðrekssaga*:

Some sent elves, and some sent serpents,
 Some sent sea-monsters, that live by the water,
 No one knew any of them, but Hildebrand alone.

R. M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England* (London: Methuen, 1952), p. 15.

⁸⁰ Seamus Heaney, trans., 'Beowulf', in ed. Daniel Donoghue, *Beowulf: A Verse Translation* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2002), pp. 3-78 (l.453, p 14).

⁸¹ Heaney, trans., 'Beowulf', ll. 109-14, p. 6.

[...] forscrifen hæfde
 in Caines cynne. Þone cwealm gewræc
 ece drihten, þæs þe he Abel slog;
 ne gefeah he þære fæhðe, ac he hine feor forwræc,
 metod for þy mane, mancynne fram.
 Þanon untydras ealle onwocon,
 eotnas ond ylfe ond orcneas,
 swylce gi[ga]ntas, þa wið gode wunnon
 lange þrage; he him ðæs lean forgeald.

Elliott van Kirk Dobbie, ed., *Beowulf and Judith* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), ll. 106-114, p. 6.

were blamed for various unexplainable conditions of ill health: skin complaints such as eczema and herpes, anaemia, chickenpox, unidentified internal pain, nightmares and insanity.⁸² Grattan and Singer give the following lay against elfshot (internal pain), known as *Við færstice* from the medical book *Lacnunga* (end of the eleventh century or beginning of the twelfth):

Loud were they, yea loud,	when they rode over the hill;
Fierce were they,	when they rode over the land
[...]	
Out little spear,	if herein be;
Sat a smith,	a knife he sledged,
Small the iron,	woeful the wound. ⁸³

The first two lines draw parallel to the Wild Hunt, or riders of the Sidhe in the Irish tradition. Riding horses suggests relatively human size; the mentions of ‘little spear’ and ‘small the iron’ might contradict that. Note, however, that the elf-shots are described as being made of iron: the elves’ supposed aversion to iron comes in later folklore. By the time of *Lacnunga*, *ælfe* were decidedly on the demonic side of nature, and malevolent towards humans without any apparent reason. It is still not clear what early medieval Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons meant by *Álfr* and *Ælfe*. While the Indo-European *albh* is a reasonable origin for the word, the concepts associated with these words at this time were clearly locally adapted. Elf is a serviceable label for this character, but elf does not always mean The Significant Other, and this latter can be known by distinctly different labels in non-Germanic speaking regions.

⁸² See Hall, pp. 96-156; J. H. G. Grattan and Charles Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine* (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 34; Nils Thun, ‘The Malignant Elves,’ *Studia Neophilologica*, 41.2 (1969), 78-396 (pp. 387-88).

⁸³ Grattan and Singer, p. 175.

Hlūde wæran h̄y lā hlūde ðā h̄y ofer þone hlæw ridan
wæran ānmōde ða h̄y ofer land ridan
[...]
ūt l̄ytel spere gif hit h̄er inne s̄y
sæt smið slōh seax
l̄ytel iserna wund swiðe
(Hall, pp. 1-3.)

Comparable characters appear in Ireland, Scotland and Wales under a variety of names, as the next chapter will go on to exemplify.

Chapter 2: The Celtic Otherworld and its Inhabitants

i. Irish

As in the case with nineteenth and early twentieth century scholarship on Germanic myth and folklore, Celtic beliefs have suffered from writers' ideas of National Romanticism. I am ambivalent about using the words 'Germanic' and 'Celtic' to refer to cultures and separating the belief into two chapters, and will address this below. Because of writing produced during the Celtic Revival, the Irish Gentry are sometimes insisted on as the original and most noble of fairy people. As mentioned in the previous chapter, fairy has become the correct word in English and is used in the Celtic areas of Britain. The Irish word is *Sídhe*, although it is unclear if this originally referred to the beings or their dwellings, as it can also be translated as 'mound'.¹ The *Sídhe* are said to be the remnants of the earlier semi-divine race *Tuatha De Danann*, meaning 'the family of Danu', who seems to have been their own goddess. The worship of deities similar to the *Tuatha De* is believed to have been present since the fourth century BC in continental Europe, and the Gundestrup cauldron, found in Denmark and dated to the first century, depicts figures that may be progenitors to the beings of later Irish belief.² Because transcriptions of legends concerning the *Tuatha De Danann* are not made until the twelfth century, earlier belief can only be speculated on.

In the *Leabhar Gabhála* ('Book of Invasions'), the *Tuatha De Danann* are named as one of the many peoples who have claimed Ireland for themselves: they are then not *the* Other but one of many, like the *Álfar*. They are, however, the people who ruled Ireland when the Celts arrived, and would have had relations with them. There are examples of cross-breeding between the *Tuatha De*, humans, and other races such as the monstrous Fomorians, which means that all of these are of relatively equal stature. There are suggestions that the

¹ Patrick S. Dinneen, *Foclóir Gaedilge Agus Béarla: an Irish-English Dictionary* (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1965) sub 'síog'.

² Proinsias Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology* (Feltham, Middlesex: Hamlyn, 1970), pp. 10-11.

Tuatha De were gigantic, as figures that sometimes are identified as them portayed on the Gundestrup cauldron are larger than mortals, and because the later sídhe hero Fionn Mac Cumhal and his host are sometimes described as giants.³ This is the description given in the *Leabhar Gabhála*:

Every secret of art, every subtlety of knowledge, and every diligence of healing that exists, from the Tuatha De Danann had their origin. And although the Faith came, these arts were not driven out, for they are good.⁴

The other text that deals with the adventures of the Tuatha De is the *Cath Maige Tuired* ('The Second Battle of Mag Tuired'). The surviving manuscript is dated to the early sixteenth century,⁵ and the tone is clearly different:

The Túatha Dé Danann were in the northern islands of the world, studying occult lore and sorcery, druidic arts and witchcraft and magical skill, until they surpassed the sages of the pagan arts. They studies occult lore and secret knowledge and diabolic arts in four cities: Falias, Gorias, Murias, and Findias.⁶

They brought from these four cities four treasures, the stone of destiny, the spear of Lugh, the sword of Nuadha and the cauldron of the Daghdha.⁷ Nuadha was the king of the Tuatha De at the time of their arrival in Ireland and was a deity associated with 'markedly different aspects' depending on the narrative;⁸ the Daghdha⁹ was the druid and father-god, while Lugh was the radiant and versatile champion.¹⁰ It is, however, unclear if the Tuatha De were believed to be divine at all. Macalister comments that the line 'Of men by lawful right' is an

³ Mac Cana, p. 11.

⁴ 'Gach diamair dhana, gach amhainsi ealathan, 7 gach leire leighis do cuisin, as ó Thuathaibh De Danann atá a bunadh. Agus cia tainic Creideamh, ní ro dichuirthe na dana sin, ar it maithe.' Macalister and Mac Neill, *Leabhar Gabhála*, pp. 172-73.

⁵ Elizabeth A. Grey, ed. and trans., *Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired* (Naas, Co. Kildare: Irish Texts Society, 1982), p. 1.

⁶ '[B]átar Túathai Dé Danonn i n-indsib túascertachaib an domuin, aig foglaim fesa 7 fithnasachta 7 amaidechtaí 7 amainsechta, combtar fortilde for súthib cerd ngenntlichtae. Ceitri catrachai i rrabatar og fochlaim fhesai 7 éolais 7 diabuldánachtaí .i. Falias 7 Goirias, Murias 7 Findias.' Grey, pp. 24-25.

⁷ Grey, p. 25. The cauldron is another proto-grail among many mentioned in old Celtic texts.

⁸ James MacKillop, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) *sub* 'Nuadha'.

⁹ The Daghdha was a title rather than a personal name, meaning 'good god'. His proper name is given as Eochaidh Ollathair (Mac Cana, p. 66).

¹⁰ Mac Cana, pp. 67-69, 66-67, 27-29; MacKillop *sub* Dagda', Nuadu Airgetlám' and 'Lug Lámfhota'. I have followed the spelling in the *Leabhar Gabhála*.

indication by the transcriber to mean that the Tuatha De Danann were mortals and not divine, as they are commonly interpreted.¹¹

The Tuatha De were skilled in magic and long-lived, but that does not necessarily make them supernatural beings. It is likely that the early Celts, like other Europeans, worshipped their ancestors, a tradition preserved in Samhain, the celebration of the dead and origin of Halloween. Veneration of ancestors is an important background to the belief in elves and fairies and has support in the cases where they are identified as the dead (see below). The time elapsed between this practice among early European and the earliest written sources dealing with these beings does present an obstacle for clearly establishing an origin. It is, however, clear that belief in beings that appear to be similar to later elves and fairies is very old and arguably pan-European, although even Celtic scholars have suggested Gothic myth as the origin of this belief, which would strengthen the argument that the *Þiðrekssaga* contains remnants of it.¹² It is also attested that Europeans as late as the early medieval period attributed 'other' peoples who were alien to them with supernatural powers, so the idea that the Tuatha De Danann and others who were later called elves or fairies were in fact quite human should be kept in mind.¹³

ii. Welsh

Characters that have later been labelled fairies appear in the medieval Welsh collection of stories known as the *Mabinogion*. The text comes from two manuscripts, the White Book of Rhydderch, dated c.1350, and the Red Book of Hergest, transcribed between 1382 and c.1410.¹⁴ Despite the existence of a multitude of texts dealing with elves and fairies by that name and distinct character from other parts of Britain and Europe, such as several chansons

¹¹ Macalister and Mac Neill, p. 157.

¹² See for example Thomas Crofton Croker, *Researches in the South of Ireland* [1824] (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1981), p. 78; Walter Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders vol. II*, ed. T. F. Henderson (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), p. 312.

¹³ See Lindow, 'Supernatural Others'.

¹⁴ Sioned Davies, trans., *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. ix.

de geste, Breton lais, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and a number of ballads, there are no words that designate any non-human used in the *Mabinogion*: from this and the textual evidence in the collection I will conclude that at the time of the transcriptions, none but one of the characters in it were considered by the scribe to be significantly different from the human characters in the stories.¹⁵ The suggested fairies are the population of Annwn, the Welsh Otherworld, in the first part of the *Mabinogion* ruled over by Arawn and later by Gwyn ap Nudd. Arawn is a major character in the first branch, *Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed* ('Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed'). He is here described as a hunter clad in grey, riding a grey horse, while he in later folklore is attributed with antlers and a black face.¹⁶ He is accompanied by the shining white dogs with bright red ears, also later taken over by Gwyn. Arawn, and later Gwyn, are in these guises the Welsh version of the leader of the Wild Hunt, a character that may be interpreted as an incarnation of the Faerie King (who, admittedly, has many guises). Arawn also carries a hunting horn, a reoccurring attribute of male elves and fairies, in particular in ballads. Arawn's dogs, the Cwn Annwn, kill a deer that Pwyll is pursuing, and Pwyll lets his own dogs eat the deer. Arawn arrives angered with him, and asks him to compensate for this injustice by trading places with himself for one year and kill his rival, Hafgan, the king of the adjacent territory to Arawn's in Annwn. Pwyll agrees and the two spend the year in each other's place, having assumed each other's shape. For the whole period, neither touches the other's wife, and both send the other gifts. Pwyll then eliminates Hafgan with a single blow, having been told that a second would revive him.

Arawn can be identified as Pwyll's Significant Other because of their mirroring relations. Their relationship, however, begins badly: Pwyll does not only let his dogs eat Arawn's prey, he also does not greet the king of Annwn when he arrives. Davies notes that it

¹⁵ The exception is Blodeuedd, a woman created from flowers by the wizard Gwyddion and therefore clearly non-human.

¹⁶ Davies, p. 3; John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, vol. I [1901] (London: Wildwood House, 1980), p. 216.

is customary in the *Mabinogion* for the person of the lower rank to greet first;¹⁷ Pwyll does not know that he is faced with a king and his attempt to repay Arawn for his discourtesy is what sets up the plot of the branch. Pwyll does impress the king and is rewarded: so far the story matches many others where humans encounter the Faerie King. The story does require a magical element, but as far as respect goes, Pwyll would have been as courteous to Arawn were he a quite human king of another country. In contrast to many other narratives where the protagonist impresses the Faerie King and is rewarded, Arawn and Pwyll are relatively equal. Arawn does not use his magic for evil purposes or in order to dominate others; the magic is used to benefit both parties in the case of the transformation. Even after Pwyll's task has been completed, he retains the title *Pen Annwn*, 'Lord of Annwn', as he is equally skilled as a ruler of the realm as Arawn.

Hafgan and Arawn present another set of doubles, as the former seems to be an anthropomorphic personification of summer and the latter one of winter. Their yearly battle is the changing of the seasons, mirrored in the later yearly battle between Gwyn and Gwythyr (see below), which would give reason to presume that Gwyn was later popularised in Arawn's role. As anthropomorphic personifications of winter and summer, the Arawn-Hafgan and Gwyn-Gwythyr couplings are probably remnants of earlier pagan beliefs, where the opposition would not be light versus darkness, but rather light versus bleakness, rather than blackness, of winter: in this sense, the inhabitants of Annwn may relate to Grimm's *genii obscuri* or pale troop.¹⁸ Pwyll's appearance in the narrative would be because Arawn would need human assistance to kill Hafgan, since the seasons could not be changed by the kind of anthropomorphic nature being that he himself represents: by killing Hafgan, Pwyll unwittingly sentences Wales to perpetually bad weather, as is reflected in Dafydd ap Gwilym's poem, discussed below.

¹⁷ Davies, p. 228.

¹⁸ Grimm, II: 444 and II: 446.

iii. Gwyn ap Nudd

The later king of Annwn, Gwyn ap Nudd, is first mentioned in a tally of Arthur's knights in *Culhwch ac Olwen* ('How Culwch won Olwen'). Gwyn, his brother Edern, and a host of other men are said to come 'From the uplands of hell', a reference to Annwn.¹⁹ The word for 'hell' is here not Annwn, but *Uffern*, a Welsh adaptation of *Infernus*: the use of *Uffern* here and the later statement that Annwn is populated by demons shows a Christian bias by the transcriber.²⁰ Eleanor Hull points out that the idea of Hell was 'grafted imperfectly' onto the native belief of Annwn, and identifies the Welsh Otherworld as

a cheerful and happy land of the superior beings, in which, as occasion arises, the chosen mortal may venture and return alive, by the special invitation of its prince.²¹

Hull's argument is that negative meanings of the land of the dead were imposed by Christianity onto a more Elysian idea of the Otherworld, which, if extended to the later idea of Faerie, could clarify why the land in some places seems like Paradise and in some more like Hell.²² Gwyn is later named as the abductor of Creiddylad, daughter of Lludd Llaw Eraint, the day before her wedding to Gwythyr son of Greidol. Gwythyr assembles an army to take on Gwyn's, Gwyn is victorious in battle, but at this point Arthur steps in. He decides that Gwyn and Gwythyr should fight each other every May Day until Judgment Day, when the victor will have Creiddylad.²³ Arthur's plan of course presupposes that both champions are immortal, and that Gwyn would withstand any chance of avoiding the wrath of God after his behaviour. After Gwyn has conquered Gwythyr's army, he captures some of them, kills a warrior called Nwython, cuts out his heart and feeds it to his son, Cyledyr, causing him to go

¹⁹ Davies, p. 184

²⁰ Dafydd Ifans and Rhiannon Ifans, eds, *Y Mabinogion* (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1980), p. 85.

²¹ Eleanor Hull, 'The Development of the Idea of Hades in Celtic Literature', *Folk-lore* 18 (June 1907), 121-65 (p. 151).

²² As for example in *Sir Orfeo*, discussed in the next chapter.

²³ Davies, p. 207. The first day of winter, 1 November, *Samhain* in Irish and *Calan Gaeaf* in Welsh, and the first day of summer, 1 May, *Beltane* in Irish and *Calan Mai* in Welsh, were dates when the boundaries between worlds were the thinnest and all manner of supernatural beings and events could be expected (Davies, p. 231). When a date is given for the events in a narrative featuring fairies, it is rare to have any other than these two.

mad;²⁴ this would give some grounds to say that Gwyn was at least faintly demonic. His presence is mentioned as a requirement for the hunting of the magic boar Twrch Trwyth, where it is said, in Davies's translation, 'God has put the spirit of the demons of Annwfn in him, lest the world be destroyed.'²⁵ Lady Guest interprets the sentence as 'God has placed over the brood of devils in Annwn, lest they should destroy the present race.'²⁶ Gwyn, then, either has demons in him, or he is their overlord; neither interpretation makes out that Gwyn is a demon himself, but should be presumed to be quite human, yet he is the one required to control the demons of Annwn.

Annwn is also given the synonym Uffern in the poem 'Preideu Annwfn', 'The Spoils of Annwn' from the book of Taliesin, also found in the Red Book of Hergest. Here, Arthur and his host raid Annwn for a magic cauldron, and as a travel report from the realm, the poem does offer some interesting observations. Its capital seems to be called *Caer Siddi*,²⁷ which can mean 'the fort of the *Sídhe*'; since 'fort' rules out the interpretation of *sídhe* as a mound in this case, it would indicate that it is the being that is referred to. Patrick Sims-Williams considers *siddi* to be an Irish borrowing as it is not a word frequently used for either of its possible meanings in Welsh.²⁸ Further clues to the appearance of *Caer Siddi* are provided in the number of alternative names, from which it can be concluded that the fort is quadratic and possibly made out of glass.²⁹ Furthermore, it is clear that Annwn is a place of sorrow and death as Taliesin says that

Three full loads of Prydwen³⁰ we went into it;
Save seven, none came back from *Caer Siddi*.³¹

²⁴ Davies, p. 207.

²⁵ Davies, p. 199.

²⁶ Lady Charlotte Guest, trans., *Mabinogion* (London: J. M. Dent, 1906), p. 99.

²⁷ *Kaer Sidi* in the manuscript.

²⁸ Patrick Sims-Williams in Taliesin, *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin*, ed. and trans. Marged Haycock (Aberystwyth: CMCS, 2007), p. 439.

²⁹ 'Chaer Wydyr', Glass Fort (l.30), and 'Gaer Ochren', Angular Fort (l.48). Taliesin, pp. 436-37.

³⁰ Arthur's ship.

³¹ 'Tri lloneit Prytwen yd aetham-ni idi:
nam[yn] seith ny dyrreith o Gaer Sidi.' Taliesin, p. 434.

The king of Annwn is here unnamed, called only *Pen Annwn*, ‘ruler of Annwn’. Because this title is also applied to Pwyll in *Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed*, it is believed that the king at this time is Arawn, although he is not physically described. Arawn is said to be a grey-clad hunter in the *Mabinogion*, while Gwyn is not described in any source. The most illustrative text that he features in is a dialogue from *The Black Book of Carmarthen* (c.1250). He is here asked by his dialogue partner Gwyddneu who and what he is, and also from which side he comes, upon which he specifies his dwelling as Mynydd y Drum (Drum Mountain) on the river Tawe near Swansea but fails to specify whether or not he is human and native of the known world or Annwn, although he does state that he is quite alive.³² However, one word in Gwyn’s initial introduction of himself has been frequently misinterpreted and has contributed to the generalisation of Gwyn and his people as sorts of fairies. Gwyn’s presentation ‘hud i’m gelwire Guin mab Nud’ has been translated by Evans as ‘I am called the Enchanter. I am Gwyn, the son of Nudd’ and by John Rhys as ‘Fairy am I called, Gwyn the son of Nudd’.³³ The translator misinterprets the word *hud*, which in modern Welsh can mean magic but which in this context simply means as, so, or thus.³⁴

The first mention of the euphemism *Tylwyth Teg* (‘The Fair Family’) is in the poem *Y Niwl* (‘The Mist’) by Dafydd ap Gwilym (c.1320-70).³⁵ They are here called *Tylwyth Gwyn*, ‘Gwyn’s Family’, after their king Gwyn ap Nudd. *Gwyn* is the common Welsh word for ‘white’, designating colour from greyish-white or pale to shining bright, which might be

³² J. Gwenogvryn Evans, ed. and intro., *The Black Book of Carmarthen* (Pwllheli: issued to subscribers only, 1907), pp. x-xi.

³³ Rachel Bromwich and Robert Brinley Jones, eds, *Astudiaethau ar yr Hengerdd: Studies in Old Welsh Poetry* (Cardiff: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1978), p. 314; Evans, p. x; Rhys in Charles Squire, *The Mythology of the British Islands* (London: Blackie, 1905), p. 256.

³⁴ Bromwich and Jones, p. 317; *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru: A Dictionary of the Welsh Language* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1950-2002) *sub* ‘hu¹, hud²’ ‘so, thus’ rather than ‘hud¹’, ‘magic, wizardry, sorcery’, etc.

³⁵ Robin Gwyndaf, ‘Fairylure: Memorates and Legends from Welsh Oral Tradition’, in Peter Narvárez, ed., *The Good People: New Fairylure Essays* (New York and London: Garland, 1991), pp. 155-95(p. 160).

descriptive of Gwyn ap Nudd's appearance.³⁶ Gwyn and his host are here associated with the mist of the title, described as

a vapour on the land,
a thick and pale-grey, weakly-trailing fleece
[...]
Troublesome high towers belonging
to the family of Gwyn, the province of the wind.
His two harsh cheeks conceal the land
torches seeking the three stars (?)
thick and ugly (?) darkness as of night
blinding the world, to cheat the poet.³⁷

Another meaning of *gwyn* is holy or blessed. On the other hand, the name *Annwn* was also used as a name for hell. So Gwyn ap Nudd, lord of *Annwn*, can be interpreted 'the holy lord of hell'.³⁸ Further associations with Lucifer are made with Gwyn's role as the leader of the Wild Hunt in Wales. In Britain their leader is Herne the Hunter, an Anglo-Saxon appropriation of the pan-Celtic horned deity Cernunnos.³⁹ In the Northern lands, the Wild Hunt was led by Odin, and his prey identified as *huldror*, the ladies of the forest, usually classified as a type of elf, by name related to the Icelandic *Huldufolk*.⁴⁰ Charles Squire identifies Gwyn as Sir Guyon of *The Faerie Queene*, and names him 'King of Shadows', an epithet of Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,⁴¹ and also as a kind of psychopompos or

³⁶ *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru sub* 'gwyn'.

³⁷ Dafydd ap Gwilym, *Poems*, ed. and trans. Rachel Bromwich (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982), ll. 24-25, ll. 29-36, pp. 132-35.

Cnu tewlwyd gwynllwyd gwanllaes
Cyfliw â mwg, cwfl y maes.

[...]

Tyrau uchel eu helynt,
Tylwyth Gwyn, talaith y gwynt.
Tir a gudd ei ddeurudd ddygn,
Torsedd yn cyrchu'r teirsygn.
Tywyllwg, un tew allardd,
Delli byd i dwyllo bardd. (Dafydd ap Gwilym., ll. 25-26, ll. 31-36.)

³⁸ Further complicated by the fact that his brother Edern is later known as St Edern of Brittany (MacKillop *sub* 'Edern').

³⁹ MacKillop *sub* 'Cernunnos'.

⁴⁰ Ebbe Schön, *Älvor, Vättar och Andra Väsen* (Kristianstad: Rabén & Sjögren, 1987), pp. 105-15.

⁴¹ Squire, p. 7.

‘reaper’ since as the leader of the Wild Hunt, his prey is humans.⁴² Rhys interprets Gwyn, as leader of the Wild Hunt, the reaper of ‘the souls of doomed men dying without baptism and penance.’⁴³ This he interprets as an encounter with either Arawn, or, in Christian terms, the Devil. In the latter case, Rhys says, the quarry should only be considered as the souls of ‘notoriously wicked men and well-known evil livers.’⁴⁴

The first translation of Tylwyth Teg as ‘fairies’ is made by William Salesbury in his *Dictionary in Englishe and Welshe* (1547).⁴⁵ Keightley claims that the Tylwyth Teg are properly Gentry-type,⁴⁶ while the accounts collected by Rhys and Evans-Wentz describes them as varying in size.⁴⁷ Keightley also locates the belief in fairies to the counties of Glamorgan, Carmarthen and Pembroke, ‘the parts into which the Saxons had penetrated farthest, and where they of course had exercised most influence’,⁴⁸ though Evans-Wentz gives examples of Tylwyth Teg from other parts of Wales.⁴⁹ Rhys describes several types of the Tylwyth Teg: one diminutive, the second dwarfish, and the third ‘far more beautiful and comely than the others, but they were honest and good towards mortals.’⁵⁰ He describes this third sort as ‘singing and carolling playfully on the fair meadows and the green slopes, at other times dancing lightly on the tops of the rushes in the valleys.’⁵¹ This variety would not only qualify as Gentry-type, but has cognates in the Swedish *Älvor*. Schön notes that ‘a connection [between *älvor*] and the old Norse concept of elves should exist, but that relation

⁴² Squire, p. 254.

⁴³ Rhys, p. 143.

⁴⁴ Rhys, p. 216.

⁴⁵ Gwyndaf, p. 159.

⁴⁶ Thomas Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology: Illustrative of the Romance and Superstition of Various Countries* [1828] (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2006. Facsimile of the revised edition: London: H. G. Bohn, 1870), p. 409.

⁴⁷ Rhys, pp. 82-83; Evans-Wentz, pp. 135-63.

⁴⁸ Keightley, p. 412.

⁴⁹ Evans-Wentz, pp. 135-63.

⁵⁰ Rhys, p. 83.

⁵¹ Cf. also Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 144: ‘The elvish folk were passing bowls from hand to hand and across the fires, and some were harping and many were singing.’

is not made clear.⁵² The *älvor* were known to dance upon misty meadows and fields as semi-translucent figures ‘as large as a two-year-old girl. In some cases somewhat bigger.

Sometimes there were also small boys, called in some dialects *alver*.⁵³ Schön relates the origin of the words *älvor* and *alver* to the obsolete adjective *alv* meaning white and concludes that the name might be connected to the whiteness of the mist.⁵⁴ This relates directly to Dafydd ap Gwilym’s poem, where Gwyn ap Nudd’s host is connected with the mist. *Niwl*, ‘mist’, has the alternative spelling *nudd*, as in the name of Gwyn’s father, who is also often given as a cognate to the Irish Nuadha.⁵⁵ Is Dafydd here using Gwyn as an anthropomorphic personification of the Welsh weather? Is this poetic simile the basis of the perception of the Tylwyth Teg as a people of the mist? In Dafydd’s description, the mist is not white but grey, and gets darker as the poem progresses, as if he is describing natural scenery in twilight. Dafydd does not use Gwyn’s patronymic, which would have been the obvious thing to do if *nudd* in this particular time was used as an alternative spelling of *niwl*. To complicate things further, a character called Niwl, Yniwn, or Ynywl, appears in *Geraint ac Enid* as Enid’s father, she being the maiden brought to Arthur’s court by Edern ap Nudd, Gwyn’s brother.⁵⁶

If we are to believe that the view of Tylwyth Teg as anthropomorphic manifestations of mist was widespread in medieval Wales, should they have not been called Tylwyth Niwl? This is unattested in surviving sources. The name Tylwyth Teg was used for any type of supernatural being and therefore corresponding to elves and fairies as a general, not of the Gentry in particular, although the human-sized characters were seen as the most noble of them.⁵⁷ Gwyn is established as the Welsh Faerie King in the story of his meeting with St Collen, found in a number of manuscripts from the sixteenth century onwards and

⁵² Schön, *Asa-Tors Hammare*, (Stockholm: Hjalmarson & Högberg, 2004), p. 74 (my trans.).

⁵³ Schön, *Älvor, Vättar*, p. 66 (my trans.).

⁵⁴ Schön, *Älvor, Vättar*, p. 67.

⁵⁵ *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* sub ‘niwl’, ‘nudd’.

⁵⁶ Christopher W. Bruce, *The Arthurian Name Dictionary* (New York and London: Garland, 1999), p. 379.

⁵⁷ See for example Evans-Wentz, p. 148.

popularised through its inclusion in Lady Guest's translation of the *Mabinogion*.⁵⁸ When St Collen was abbot of Glastonbury he heard some mean speaking of Gwyn ap Nudd as king of the fairies. He rebuked them but later received a summons from Gwyn himself to come and meet him. After having refused twice, Collen prepared a bottle of holy water, and went. When he came to the top of the hill where he had been asked to go, he saw a grand castle, maidens, knights, and approximately everything else seen by Sir Orfeo in the Breton lai (discussed in the next chapter). The castle was as luxurious and he found the king sitting on a chair of gold. Gwyn asked if he liked the liveries of his men, which were red and blue. Collen responded that 'Blue is for eternal cold, and red is for the flames of Hell, whence you came'.⁵⁹ The saint then threw the holy water on the heads of the king and his people, whereupon the castle and all its inhabitants disappeared.⁶⁰

iv. White Lord characters

Gwyn is said to have a cognate in Irish mythology in the later hero Fionn Mac Cumhall. The proof for this is etymological, as Gwyn and Fionn both mean white or brightness and are believed to have a common root. Mac Cana says about Fionn that

He is probably to be equated with Gwyn ap Nudd who appears fleetingly in Welsh tradition as 'magic warrior-huntsman' and leader of the otherworld folk. Moreover, the Celtic form *vindos*, 'white', which gives Irish Fionn and Welsh Gwynn, is attested on the Continent in the deity-name Vindonnus and in a number of place-names (e.g. Vindobona) where it seems likely that it was used as a deity-name. The fact that the same basic theme appears to underlie several of the earliest tales of Fionn as is found in the myth of Lugh's destruction of Balor seems to corroborate these indications. Indeed there are various other analogies between the traditions of Fionn, 'The Fair One', and Lugh, 'The Bright One', and it has been suggested – not implausibly – that Fionn may originally have been another name for the god Lugh.⁶¹

Etymology might not be enough to support claims that one character is the same as another:

⁵⁸ Idris L. Foster, 'Appendix G: Gwyn ap Nudd' in Gerard Murphy, intro., notes, app. and gloss., *Duanaire Finn: The Book of the Lays of Fionn, part III* (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1953), pp. 198-204 (p. 203).

⁵⁹ This is cited from Briggs, *Fairies in Tradition*, p. 13, as Guest omits the references to Hell here, which I consider to be of significance.

⁶⁰ Guest, pp. 259-60.

⁶¹ Mac Cana, p. 110. See also Murphy's introduction to the *Duanaire Finn* (III: lxxxii-lxxxiv).

there would be several other indicia needed to justify that, including corresponding behaviour, appearance and relations to other characters with correspondences with other traditions. Mac Cana's, and others', analyses disregard the importance of localised adaptations of deities, and succumb to the temptation of claiming pan-Celtic universality. Gwyn and Fionn do have certain features in common, but so does Vidga, arguably enough for him to be added to this group of White Lords (combined warrior/huntsman and magician/prophet): treating Celtic and Germanic traditions as incommensurable would point to a modernised view of history that is significantly affected by National Romanticism. Mac Cana agrees that 'To speak of "Celtic mythology" is not to imply a close unity, but merely to recognise a tangible relationship based upon common inheritance',⁶² and that 'it can safely be presumed that all [tribes] have assimilated much of the religious thought and usage of the pre-Celtic inhabitants of their several areas.'⁶³

The problem is also that Fionn is not particularly elvish, in terms of being a *Sídhe*. He does frequently have traffic with the *Sídhe*, but mostly this word is not used for them, and the fairy-element is a later addition. One narrative that has been accepted into the Irish fairy 'canon' is *Laoidh Oisín i dTír na nOg* ('The Lay of Oisín in the Land of Youth'). It is not found in the Middle-Irish *Duanaire Finn* ('The Book of the Lays of Fionn'), but was written down from oral tradition by Michael Comyn (Micheál Coimín) around 1750.⁶⁴ The tale narrates the appearance of the *Sídhe*-maiden Niamh to the Fiana, where she tells Fionn that she has fallen in love with his son Oisín. Oisín then follows Niamh to *Tír na nOg*, the 'Land of Youth', where castles, people, clothing, jewellery and weapons are as grand as in other narratives describing the land of Faerie. There he comes across one of the white, red-eared

⁶² Mac Cana, p. 18.

⁶³ Mac Cana, p. 19.

⁶⁴ MacKillop *sub* 'Oisín'. MacNeil therefore rejects it from the Fenian tradition for not being medieval. Eoin MacNeil, trans., *Duanaire Finn: The Book of the Lays of Fionn*, vol. I (London: Published for the Irish Texts Society by David Nutt, 1908), p. xxvi.

dogs of Annwn chasing a faun, the pair having run all the way from Welsh and Greek mythology respectively.⁶⁵ After some time in Tír na nOg, Oisín longs for his family and friends, and is allowed to return to Ireland. On his return, Oisín notes that the people he meets are surprised by his size, as Fionn and all the other giants are dead.⁶⁶ There is no indication that Niamh is in any way smaller than him, which, as mentioned above, might suggest that the Tuatha De Danann were bigger than humans. The question of the possible gigantic size of Fionn and his host is arguable because on the one hand, Fionn has no problem with having sexual relations with human women, on the other, he is said to have created some of the mountain passes, caves and lakes in Ireland and Scotland.⁶⁷ Fionn and his host are not *Sídhe* in the *Duanaire Finn*, but they frequently meet people who might fit the later description of them:

Time after time they find themselves in pursuit of a magic stag or boar which leads them to a secluded dwelling where they encounter strange and often perilous experiences. In other ways too they maintain constant dialogue with the people of the *sídh* or subterranean otherworld.⁶⁸

One of these episodes is known as *Caoilte's Urn*, Caoilte being Fionn's nephew and one of the transcribers of the *Duanaire Finn*. Fionn and eight of his warriors have been hunting a wild boar which leads them to a *sídhe*, here with the meaning mound. When they enter it, they are greeted by a king and queen, prince and princess, and at least four hundred other people, while there is still plenty of room to sit on the crystal benches inside it: this is evidently no mound but a palace entered through a portal. The king, Eanna, informs Fionn that his son was the boar who was riddling the company, and that he himself was the giant they encountered before, and that he would now like to apologise for any inconvenience to Fionn and the Fiana. He then provides them with as much treasure as they would like,

⁶⁵ Michael Comyn, 'The Lay of Oisín in the Land of Youth', trans. Brian O'Looney, in Alfred Perceval Graves, ed. *The Irish Fairy Book* (Teddington: Senate, 1994), pp. 62-78 (p. 68).

⁶⁶ Comyn, p. 75.

⁶⁷ MacKillop *sub* 'Fionn mac Cumhaill'.

⁶⁸ Mac Cana, p. 109.

including the precious urn, later given to Caoilte.⁶⁹ Despite being having powers of transformation and residing in a magical mound, it seems as though the scribe considers Eanna and his host to be human: his queen Craoibhfinn is described as ‘most beautiful of the human race’,⁷⁰ and Fionn and Eanna give ‘the surety of man to man’⁷¹ that Eanna’s son should not be harmed if he would like to join the Fiana. The people of the *sídh*e are then not yet non-humans, as supernatural qualities were not exclusively of a supernatural people.⁷²

v. *The misty type*

The White Lord characters seem to indicate that the interpretation of the Gentry-type of elves/fairies as beings associated with light and whiteness was once widespread in Europe, and it would be reasonable to consider the textual evidence preserved as remnants of this belief. While White Lords were individually more prominent, the White Ladies were found in greater numbers. White Lords and White Ladies are not natural couples; there seems to be no instance of them being found together from which it can be concluded that they were different interpretations of the same sort of being. The Swedish *Älvor* might well be an alternative view of Dafydd ap Gwilym’s *Tylwyth Gwyn* as misty beings. The misty sort is commonly observed but has limited use in a narrative: they cannot speak or touch anything for a start.⁷³ White Ladies can also be the leader of the Wild Hunt or host of the dead, as in the case with the German Frau Holda.⁷⁴ *Wisse Frauen* tend to otherwise be guardians of treasures in folk-tales.⁷⁵ Linguistically, Gwenhwyfar (later Guenivere) could be identified as a White Woman:⁷⁶ Evans-Wentz suggests the second element in the name to originate in **seibaro*, supposedly the origin of the Irish *sídh*e, while Rachel Bromwich argues that

⁶⁹ For once the urn does not have magical powers.

⁷⁰ MacNeil, p. 145.

⁷¹ MacNeil, p. 146.

⁷² Shapeshifting and other magical arts are frequent in the *Mabinogion*, while the people who perform them seem to be quite human.

⁷³ Evans-Wentz recorded many observations of misty beings or beings of light, see for example pp. 83-84.

⁷⁴ Grimm, III: 968. See also Briggs, *Fairies in Tradition*, p. 41, for more spectral white females.

⁷⁵ Grimm, III: 962.

⁷⁶ *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* sub ‘Gwenwyfar’.

Gwenwyfar and the name of the Irish Finnabair, the daughter of Queen Medb, both have their origin in this stem.⁷⁷ Spence identifies the banshee as a type of white woman, and as an ancestral spirit.⁷⁸ Grimm gives the derivation from *albus*, yet he does not include the white women in his definition of elf, probably because he has already outlined smallness as a general characteristic.⁷⁹ Later writers such as Lewis Spence and Katharine Briggs tend to describe elves and fairies as diminutive and human-sized variously throughout, without providing any classification of the type that Grimm and Evans-Wentz do, other than mentioning the Gentry as one of many types.⁸⁰ Another inconsistency commonly found in descriptions of elves and fairies is that they are insubstantial. Robert Kirk claims that they are made out of 'congealed air' while still being able to mate with humans, give birth, and leave quite solid changelings.⁸¹ It is common in folk narratives that formerly insubstantial beings become solid when it is required, for example, if the story features the possibility of sexual encounters, human midwives attending to fairy births, new mothers kidnapped to nurse fairy children, and human children kidnapped and changelings left. Rojcewicz relates the insubstantial elf/fairy to aliens and confirms that

Fairies, like angels, demons, ghosts, and apparitions, assume forms of luminous, glowing light. Light is a constant feature in occult, mystical, and religious experience. Even Lucifer, the 'Prince of Darkness,' once shined brightest of all the angels. In addition, the confrontation with 'beings of light' is a standard feature of close encounters with death.⁸²

The particular sheen radiating from this sort of insubstantial elf or fairy could relate to the Anglo-Saxon word *scín*. Lazamon describes Argante, his version of Morgan, as 'aluen

⁷⁷ Evans-Wentz, p. 310; Rachel Bromwich, ed. trans. and comm., *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961), p. 380.

⁷⁸ Lewis Spence, *British Fairy Origins* (London: Watts & Co., 1946), p. 5.

⁷⁹ Grimm, III: 962-1163, II: 449.

⁸⁰ Spence, p. 3; Briggs, *Fairies in Tradition*, p. 218.

⁸¹ Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth: An Essay of the Nature and Actions of the Subterranean (and for the Most Part) Invisible People, Heretofore Going Under the Name of Elves, Fauns and Fairies*, intro. Marina Warner [1692] (New York: New York Review of Books, 2007), p. 6.

⁸² Peter M. Rojcewicz, 'Between One Eye Blink and the Next: Fairies, UFOs, and Problems of Knowledge', in Peter Narváez, ed., *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* (New York and London: Garland, 1991), pp. 478-519 (p. 485).

swiðe sceone', which Barron and Weinberg translate as 'fairest of fairy women'.⁸³ Williams gives an extended etymology:

Scinn means both 'skin' and 'phantom, illusion, magical image'; *scinn craeft* is 'sorcery, magic'; *scinnes* is 'radiance'; *scinan* 'shine'; *sciene* 'beautiful, brilliant, light'; *scinnhiw* 'specter, illusion.'⁸⁴

If *ælf* had a meaning similar to *alph* to the Anglo-Saxons, would not *ælfscinu* be a kind of double expression for a light apparition? Perhaps we should presume that *ælf* at this time already denoted a character, as in a member of an identified people, rather than an appearance, whereas *scinn* would signify light apparition, which may be related to *faerie*, if it was used to denote a vision of supernatural nature.⁸⁵ Whether this kind of light was good or evil would be a matter of interpretation. Reverend Robert Kirk, in his essay 'The Secret Commonwealth', says that

of a middle nature betwixt man and angel (as were daemons said to be of old), of intelligent, studious spirits and light changeable bodies (like those called astral) somewhat of the nature of a condensed cloud, and best seen in twilight.⁸⁶

As in most other folkloristic accounts, while the fairies are not solid, they still manage to abduct women as nursemaids, spin and embroider, carry weapons, and have aristocratic rulers and laws.⁸⁷ Kirk claimed to have been taken by the fairies himself, a claim Marina Warner suggests was influenced by *Thomas Rhymer*,⁸⁸ and is believed to have been taken for good in the end, as his ghost is supposed to have appeared at his funeral, saying that he was a prisoner in Fairyland.⁸⁹

The cross-cultural and cross-temporal spread of the light-beings would suggest that they are real, insofar as the experience has taken place in reality, although it is never bereft of

⁸³ Lazamon, pp. 254-55.

⁸⁴ Noel Williams, 'The Semantics of the Word *Fairy*', in Peter Narváez, ed., *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* (New York and London: Garland, 1991), pp. 457-78 (p. 465).

⁸⁵ Bosworth and Toller *sub* 'scin'.

⁸⁶ Kirk, pp. 5-6.

⁸⁷ Kirk, pp. 10-17.

⁸⁸ Warner in Kirk, p. xxvii.

⁸⁹ Warner in Kirk, p. xxviii-xxvix.

the interpretation coloured by the time and place it occurs in. The realm of Faerie, and similar Otherworlds, would then be the place where things happen that cannot be explained or described, yet are nonetheless real. As Tolkien says,

I will not attempt to define that, nor to describe it directly. It cannot be done. Faerie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible.⁹⁰

The establishment of the realm of Faerie marks a new stage in the literary history of elves: because the name became so widely accepted, a variety of beings that had formerly been contained in a different world and different cultural contexts became increasingly conflated. Furthermore, they, and what they represented, were now contained in that world, and some of the enchantment previously found in belief in the mundane world was lost.

⁹⁰ J. R. R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy-stories', in *Tree and Leaf* (London: Unwin, 1966), pp. 11-70 (p. 16).

Chapter 3: The People of *the Fairy*

i. The Word 'Fairy'

Fairy has been used as a synonym for *elf* since the sixteenth century, and was adopted into the English language from the French by means of *Sir Orfeo*, a Breton Lai written in Middle English around 1320.¹ Tolkien observes that '*Fairy*, as a noun more or less equivalent to *elf*, is a relatively modern word, hardly used until the Tudor period',² and that

The diminutive being, elf or fairy, is (I guess) in England largely a sophisticated product of literary fancy. It is perhaps not unnatural that in England, the land where the love of the delicate and fine has often reappeared in art, fancy should in this matter turn towards the dainty and diminutive, as in France it went to court and put on powder and diamonds.³

Most folklorists consider fairies as changeable in size, or use the word as a general term for supernatural beings.⁴ Reverend Robert Kirk, writing in Scotland at the end of the seventeenth century, describes fairies as human-sized and insubstantial, as described in chapter 2. John Gregorson Campbell, in his *Superstition of the Scottish Highlands*, rejects the use of the word as a general term, and refers to the diminutive sort as the 'true Fairy, or Elfin race'.⁵ Thomas Crofton Croker, writing in Ireland in the nineteenth century, dedicates a chapter to 'those romantic little sprites denominated Fairies',⁶ but then goes on to describe changelings and human women abducted to serve as nursemaids or midwives, which presupposes human size of fairies. As this matter is subject to individual interpretation, fairy cannot be determined to have one true or genuine meaning as this would entail a standardisation of the inner imagination that would be detrimental to belief.

The establishment of Faerie as the Otherworld could be seen as a popular third

¹ *OED* sub 'fairy', 1. This date refers to the oldest manuscript where the Lai is preserved, Auchinleck, which is dated by Bliss and Tolkien rather to 1330. A. J. Bliss, ed., *Sir Orfeo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. x; J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Sir Orfeo*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2006), pp. 17-95 (p. 14).

² Tolkien, 'On Fairy-stories', p. 14.

³ Tolkien, 'On Fairy-stories', p. 13.

⁴ See for example Rhys, pp. 82-83; Spence, pp. 9-11; Briggs, *Fairies in Tradition*, p. 3.

⁵ John Gregorson Campbell, *Superstitions of the Scottish Highlands* (Glasgow: MacLehose, 1900), p. 7.

⁶ Croker, p. 78.

alternative to Heaven and Hell and as a reserve for magic and magical beings that were anathema and should not be allowed to roam freely. Fairies were still popular with the peasant class, as they would reward good people when their masters would not, and punish sinners independent of their class. In their role as judges, the mostly accepted derivation from the Latin *fāta*, referring to the Fates (*Fatae*) of Roman mythology, is preserved.⁷ However, references to *fairy* as a being come very late. The Old French word *faerie* was on the one hand a place name and on the other what existed in it – not a being, but magic or enchantment, and this was the meaning imported into Middle English.⁸ In ‘On Fairy-stories’, Tolkien comments on an error in the earliest reference to *fairy* as a being in the *OED*. It comes from Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* (1393), and the citation in the *OED* is ‘And as he were a fairie’.⁹ Tolkien corrects this to ‘And as he were *of* faerie’, and goes on to define Faerie as ‘the realm or state in which fairies have their being’.¹⁰ In Tolkien’s meaning, being *faerie* or being *in Faerie* would translate to being under the influence of magic, or enchanted. Tolkien would probably disagree with the correlation between magic and enchantment: in his meaning, the realm of Faerie could be experienced if one gave in to enchantment and set oneself in a state of wonder, while magic meant a will to have power over the external world.¹¹ Tolkien preferred the spelling *faërie* in order to avoid the modern interpretation of fairies as diminutive, and refer more to the medieval use of the word. *Faërie* in Tolkien’s use does according to Verlyn Flieger,

not refer to a supernatural creature but to supernatural activity (the act of enchanting) and/or the condition (the state of being enchanted).¹²

⁷ C. T. Onions, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966) *sub* ‘fay’.

⁸ Alan Hindley, Frederick W. Langley, Brian J. Levy, *Old French-English Dictionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) *sub* ‘faerie’; Onions *sub* ‘fairy’.

⁹ *OED sub* ‘Fairy’, 4.a.

¹⁰ Tolkien, ‘On Fairy-stories’, pp. 14-15 (emphasis added).

¹¹ Tolkien, ‘On Fairy-stories’, p. 16; Patrick Curry, ‘Enchantment’, in Michael D. C. Drout, ed., *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 159-60.

¹² Verlyn Flieger, ‘Faërie’, in Michael D. C. Drout, ed., *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 184-85 (p. 184).

ii. Medieval 'fairies'

Although it is tempting to believe that the medieval word, usually spelt *fayrye* or *fayrie*, refers to a being because we are used to thinking that it does, the people mentioned as 'of the *fayrye*' and similar phrasings, are never mentioned as fairies themselves. Most commonly they are called knights and ladies or other words that designate persons who are quite human. Critics tend to take the line that characters can rightfully be called fairies if they are mentioned in circumstances where the word is used, disregarding the fact that the word is never applied to a person in medieval texts. *Fairy* in its medieval meaning refers to a power that can be very inexactly translated as magic, enchantment, or fate. The Old English *wyrd* (NE *weird*) might be a more suitable comparison, and the words coincide in the case of the embodiments of this power, the Fates in Roman mythology, in English sometimes called the Weird Sisters. The abstract meaning and the fact that there is no suitable modern translation of the word has led to a number of misconceptions regarding the medieval meaning of *fairy*. It is by most critics casually attributed to the population of Avalon in Arthurian texts, who indeed are magically skilled but are by no means non-humans. These 'fairies', like elves at this time, still lack any non-human characteristics, and there is then no reason to separate them out from the human race due to physical appearance. Like elves, the people of 'the fairy' were separated on the grounds of being Other in general, in the condition of possessing magical powers, but not because they were biologically non-humans. In the ballad *Tam Lin*, the title character is a human abducted to Faerie by its queen, yet when he meets the maiden called Janet or Margaret in different versions of the ballad, she has doubts about their union as he seems to her too 'fairyfied' from abiding in that realm, why she asks him to give his pedigree to prove that he is human: it cannot be decided by the mere sight of him.¹³

¹³ Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, vols I and II (New York: Dover, 2003), I:

iii. *Marie de France*

An early (late twelfth century) mention of persons of the *fairy* from the French Arthurian tradition is *Lanval*, a Breton Lai transcribed by Marie de France. Lanval, a knight of the Round Table, has been neglected when Arthur has been handing out gifts. He rides off alone and comes across a very beautiful maiden who promises him her love. She equips him with lavish costumes and riches, and he rides back to the court. There Queen Guinevere professes her love for him, but he rejects her. Lanval is then put to trial for slandering the Queen, at which point the maiden returns to speak on his behalf. He is acquitted and they ride together to Avalon. The unnamed maiden says ‘No man save you will see me or hear my voice’,¹⁴ although she is quite visible and audible when she arrives at Arthur’s court. Lanval is then a chosen one to have the privilege of meeting her and be rewarded: it is Lanval’s own Otherness that makes him particularly susceptible to seeing this being from the Otherworld, as Paula Clifford points out.¹⁵ While the place-name Avalon is mentioned, the maiden is not named, and never called a fairy. Critics presume that she is a fairy because of the mention of Avalon, and O’Sharkey’s identification of her as Morgan le Fay has been influential.¹⁶ The function of the mysterious lady is generally that of the elf-figure, yet it is significant and in keeping with Marie’s other writing that she is unnamed and has no distinguishing features that would facilitate clear identification. Marie does mention the word ‘fee’ once in another Lai, *Guigemar*:

Dedenz unt la dame trovee,
Ki de beuté resemble fee.¹⁷

335-58.

¹⁴ Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. and intro. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 75.

¹⁵ Paula Clifford, *Marie de France: Lais* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1982), p. 56.

¹⁶ Eithne M. O’Sharkey, ‘The Identity of the Fairy Mistress in Marie de France’s *Lanval*’, *Trivium* 6 (May 1971), 17-25.

¹⁷ Marie de France, *Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Jean Rychner (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1966), *Guigemar* ll.703-4, p. 27.

Burgess and Busby translate this as ‘there they found a lady who was as lovely as a fairy’.¹⁸

A more direct translation would be ‘there they found a lady whose beauty resembled *fairy*’, as in the power. The scarce use of ‘fee’ demonstrates firstly that it was not essential for strange, unidentified persons to be called by any particular name that would single them out, and secondly that Marie’s English audience might not be familiar with the term, as the word had not entered the English language around the time when Marie was writing.

iv. Sir Orfeo

The entry point is instead another Breton Lai that is not credited to Marie de France. *Sir Orfeo* is a local retelling of the Greek Orpheus myth, but here Hades has been exchanged for the land of the *fairy* being where the lady, here called Heurodis (Eurydice in the Greek) is taken.¹⁹ The reason why Hades has been supplanted by the King of Fairy might be that abduction-narratives were already popular in Breton folk tradition. These abduction-narratives continued to be popular in folk traditions in the later Middle Ages and beyond. Here, the King first comes to Heurodis in a dream, impressing on her that she must come with him the following day or else his people will tear her apart. Orfeo assembles one thousand knights to guard Heurodis yet she is snatched and no one gets a look at the abductor: despite the supernatural delivery of the warning in a dream, Orfeo is not expecting his enemies to be a people of magical talent. The description of the manner of her abduction should leave no translator in doubt:

Ac ȝete amides hem ful riȝt
 Þe quen was oway y-twiȝt,
 Wiþ fairi forþ y-nome
 — Men wist neuer wher sche bicomē.²⁰

Even Tolkien, who apart from this instance, translates *fairy*²¹ as Faërie, with a capital letter

¹⁸ Marie de France, *Lais*, p. 52.

¹⁹ For further elaboration on the re-interpretation of Classical themes as to do with fairies, see Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders*, pp. 325-35.

²⁰ Bliss, Auchinleck ll.191-194, p. 18.

²¹ As it appears in Auchinleck in all places but this and the instance directly below.

and meaning the name of a place, now puts forth that

And yet from midst of that array
the queen was sudden snatched away;
by magic was she from them caught,
and none knew wither she was brought.²²

A similar description is found of the people who are found within the castle to where Heurodis is taken: 'Wip fairi pider y-come', which Tolkien similarly translates as 'thither by fairy magic brought'.²³ Tolkien perhaps distinguishes between the spellings *fairi* and *fairy*, meaning that the former designates a power while the latter means a place. There is little support for Tolkien's interpretation of *fairy* as a realm in *Sir Orfeo*: the first mention is in the preamble that states that many popular tales are 'of fairy'.²⁴ The others concern the 'king of fairy' and the 'lond of fairy', which do not seem to refer to neither a being nor a place, but rather to tales, the king, and the land of magic or enchantment.²⁵

Tolkien's interpretation is understandable as the word *fairy* later in the fourteenth century does designate a place, but not necessarily in *Sir Orfeo*. His opinion of Faërie connects to his general appreciation of its population, which forms the basis for his later children's story *Smith of Wootton Major*. The story, discussed in more detail in chapter 10, makes reference to fairies of fairy- and folk-tales, and departs significantly from his Middle-earthly writings about Elves. In *Smith of Wootton Major*, published in 1967, Tolkien has again changed the spelling of the place-name to *Faery*, and he comments that

It is plainly shown that Faery is a vast world in its own right, that does not depend for its existence upon Men, and which is not primarily nor indeed principally concerned with Men. The relationship must therefore be one of love: the Elven folk, the chief inhabitants of Faery, have an ultimate kinship with Men and have a permanent love for them in general.²⁶

²² J. R. R. Tolkien, trans. 'Sir Orfeo', in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Sir Orfeo*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2006), pp. 128-44 (p. 133 (emphasis added)).

²³ Bliss, l.404, p. 35; Tolkien, 'Sir Orfeo', p. 138.

²⁴ Bliss, l.10, p. 3.

²⁵ Bliss, l.285, p. 26; l.562, p. 47.

²⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien 'Smith of Wootton Major', essay in *Smith of Wootton Major* (London: HarperCollins, 2005),

Tolkien's evaluation is rather optimistic considering the dangers that Faerie holds. In *Sir Orfeo*, the title character enters the realm through a rock and goes on to find a magnificent castle which seems to be made out of crystal, not wholly unlike the glass fort of Taliesin.²⁷

Like Annwn, the Otherworld of *Sir Orfeo* is on the one hand luxurious for its inhabitants and on the other a place of death: in the crystal castle Orfeo sees dead, dying, dismembered and mad people.²⁸

v. *Ballads*

An equally malignant male elf is found in a family of ballads usually referred to as *Lady Isabel and the Elf-knight*. The knight is equipped with a magical horn, the sound of which no maiden can resist. Lady Isabel goes to him, and he says that he has drowned several maidens before and now it is her turn. She manages to get the knight to lay his head in her lap while she sings to him, when she takes the opportunity to sever his head. In some versions, she carries the head back to her home and places it on the table, where it continues to talk.

The ballad is based on the Biblical Judith's beheading of Holofernes, the latter a name sometimes used for the knight. As described in chapter 3, Judith in the Anglo-Saxon poem is *ælfscinu*, beautiful or light as an elf, yet in the ballad the meaning of *elf* is 'outlandish'.²⁹ *Elf*, in the ballads collected by Child, means a strange person, a foreigner, and someone who should be feared. Elfland, Elfame or Faerie is a place you could be taken to, as in *Sir Orfeo* and later accounts, yet it is less of a place where you would want to go, as in the accounts of men (chiefly) who would meet beautiful women and be rewarded with riches. Ballads are characteristically cautionary and grim, warning for strangers who could be murderers, rapists or abductors, or bring disease to the community. The elf-figure was then blamed for such

pp. 84-101(p. 93).

²⁷ Taliesin, l.130, p. 436.

²⁸ Bliss, ll.387-401.

²⁹ Child, I: 22.

misfortunes, as one part of the community could not have been guilty. The king and queen are frequently featured, as properly identified persons of this criminal sort. The villainous queen appears in both *Thomas the Rhymer* and *Tam Lin*, which in combination with the similar names of the title characters (Tam is a Scottish diminutive of Thomas)³⁰ have features that might be connected. In *Thomas the Rhymer*, the queen abducts the young Thomas, to remain in Elfland for three or seven years, depending on the version. On his restoration to the human world, she gives him the gift of prophecy, combined with an inability to lie. Child interprets the ballad as another version of *Ogier le Danois*, and the queen as Morgan le Fay.³¹ In some versions, Thomas is threatened to be the elvish tithe to Hell, the once-every-nine-year fee made up of nine persons, payable to the Devil, which again is mirrored in *Tam Lin*.³² Tam Lin is also a human abducted by the elves, yet he appears to a lady called Margaret or Janet much in the same manner as the malignant elf-knight who meets Lady Isabel. Also in keeping with the social function of the male elf-figure, what follows is a rape, yet the lady is willing to save Tam from being the next tithe to Hell for the sake of having a father to her child. He instructs her that when the host of elves come by next, she is to jump up on his horse and hold him while he goes through a number of transformations to different animals. She does this, and he finally ends up in his human form. The queen is furious but can do nothing, as the lady has broken her spell by holding him.

Male elves in ballads usually play the part of the sexually threatening outsider, and rarely claim to be kings or any other dignity. One possible mention is in *Hind Etin*, as the title character says that his father is king over the realm.³³ As in *Lady Isabel and the Elf-knight*, the lady, here called Margaret, hears the sound of a horn and makes for the woods. She is

³⁰ Although Scott interprets the name as foreign, possibly French or Norman. Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders*, pp. 384-85.

³¹ Child, I: 319.

³² Child, I: 318.

³³ Child, I: 367.

however not killed but kept prisoner in a tree-house for six years, giving birth to seven sons for Etin. When Etin is out hunting alone, Margaret and her sons escape back to her father, who is a king. The king's men then go looking for Etin, not to kill him, but to bring him to court and reunite him with his family. The ballad has a happy ending, as the entire family is baptised into Christendom. There are several other ballads of similar structure (maiden abducted by roguish man and forced to live with him and bear his children), where the man is identified as an elf or other supernatural being. In a related Swedish ballad 'Den Bergtagna', the abductor claims to be the king of the mountain, who is in some versions also named as an elf, for example 'älven' in a transcription from the 1810s.³⁴ 'Bergtagen', literally 'taken into the mountain', is in Swedish a generic term for being taken by elves or other supernatural agents, independent of where the captivity takes place.

vi. *Auberon*

A progenitor to this threatening male elf-figure is Auberon. The name is first mentioned in the French verse Romance *Huon de Bordeaux* (c.1260).³⁵ Auberon is not of the Gentry-type, but in fact a hunchback dwarf with a face of angelic beauty who is first encountered by Huon and his men when they are hunting in a forest. Like many other male elves, Auberon carries a horn, and this particular one has multiple powers: it heals the sick, cures hunger, makes the hearer happy, and finally, it attracts whoever hears it towards the owner of the horn.³⁶ Huon and his company have their weariness appeased by the horn, but they refuse to stay and speak to Auberon. Huon says of Auberon that

³⁴ Sven-Bertil Jansson, *Den Levande Balladen* (Stockholm: Prisma, 1999), p. 163. See also E. G. Geijer and A. Afzelius, eds, *Svenska Folkvisor* (Stockholm: Z. Hæggströms Förlag, 1880), pp. 1-4, for other versions.

³⁵ The spelling was changed to Oberon in Lord Berners' English translation out of which the first edition was printed in 1513. The edition used in this chapter is the third, printed in 1601, whilst the second might have been printed in 1570. The translation is Shakespeare's source for the name Oberon. James P. Carley, 'Bourchier, John, second Baron Berners (c.1467–1533)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. Accessed from <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2990>>, accessed 12 July 2009.

³⁶ John Bourchier, Lord Berners, trans., *The ancient, honorable, famous, and delighfull historie of Huon of Bourdeaux, one of the peeres of Fraunce, and Duke of Guyenne*. Accessed from *Early English Books Online*, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/fulltext?source=configpr.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=D00000998400480000&FILE=../session/1247237399_2740&DISPLAY=default>, 10 July 2009, chapter 21.

I neuer sawe in my life so faire a creature in the visage, I haue great maruaile how he can speake of almightie God, for I thinke he be a Deuill of hell, & since he speaketh of God, mée thinkes we ought to speake to him, for I thinke such a creature can haue no power to doe vs any euill, I thinke hee be not past the age of fiue yeaes.³⁷

His appearance, while not his size, is a change from the *Nibelungenlied*: there he is described as ‘very strong and ferocious’, ‘brave and subtle’, and as an old man who is grabbed by the beard by Siegfried.³⁸ Some of Auberon’s loss of valour has occurred in Lord Berner’s translation: in this, Auberon is most often called ‘the Dwarf’ while in the original French he is usually ‘Auberon le faé’.³⁹ Ruelle defines *faé* as meaning ‘talanted with magic of supernatural equipment’, and *faerie* simply as magic.⁴⁰ The abstract meaning of fairy is clear in the instance when in Lord Berners’ translation ‘Ten faire young men, they were all of the Fayrie’, enter the castle Adamant that is ‘made by craft of the Fayrie’, whilst the inhabitants of the castle are ‘condemned by the Fayrie’.⁴¹ *The Fayrie* could perhaps be compared with the later word *glamour*, of Scottish Gaelic origin, as this can also have the meaning magic or enchantment, in particular something that is cast upon someone to delude their senses.⁴² *The Fayrie* can perhaps be best viewed as a power, and can be compared with the Old English word *wyrd*, the origin of the modern word *weird*.⁴³ The original ‘fairies’ might then be the Weird Sisters, also known as the Fates of Roman mythology, who in Northern beliefs were called the Norns. The three norns *Urd*, *Verdandi* and *Skuld*, whose names can be translated as ‘was’, ‘is’ and ‘will be’, decide people’s fate and may have been thought to be present at the birth of a child.⁴⁴ This latest idea would correlate with *Huon de Bordeaux*, where Auberon at birth has been enchanted to stop growing at the age of three, among many other things, by

³⁷ Berners, chapter 23.

³⁸ A. T. Hatto, *The Nibelungenlied* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 71.

³⁹ Berners, chapter 21, Pierre Ruelle, ed., *Huon de Bordeaux* (Brussels: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles/Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960), 1.3810, p. 205.

⁴⁰ ‘doué par magie de pouvoirs surnaturels’, Ruelle, p. 462.

⁴¹ Berners, chapter 107.

⁴² *OED* sub ‘fairy’, 3; *OED* sub ‘glamour’, n. 1.

⁴³ *OED* sub ‘weird’, n.

⁴⁴ John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: a Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) sub ‘norns’.

some ladies acquainted to his mother, yet these are never mentioned in connection with *fairy*.⁴⁵ It is conceivable that *fairy* once equated to *wyrd*, and that as the meanings of both words changed over time, the word *glamour* became popularised for this state and particularly associated with the magical influence of fairies.

vii. *Auberon/Alberich as a Diminutive Other*

The character of Auberon in this text could then be seen as intermediate between the dwarf Alberich from the *Nibelungenlied* and Shakespeare's Fairy King. This development should be a step up for the still three-foot-tall Auberon, but he has in *Huon de Bordeaux* lost much of the respect given to him in the *Nibelungenlied*: in the lied he is quite equal to the protagonist Siegfried, and they are in their first fight likened to 'raging lions'.⁴⁶ His Otherness is taken much further in the chanson, as he is feared by Huon and his men for his magical powers and at the same time patronised and called 'crooked' and 'little'.⁴⁷ Huon does not actually show Auberon any respect until he has impressed him with his riches and magical powers, while Huon goes on to continually defy Auberon's commands and still expect the Dwarf to succour him, which is what happens.⁴⁸ As stated above, Auberon is never called 'Fayrie' or 'king of the Fayrie': the closest the text gets is 'the Dwarfe of the Fayry Kinge Oberon'.⁴⁹ *Alberich* means 'ruler of the elves', yet he is in the *Nibelungenlied* king of the dwarves and there are no other references to elves.⁵⁰ However, the character of Hagen/Högni, familiar from the *Þiðrekssaga*, is also found in the *Nibelungenlied*, yet he has lost his half-elfhood.⁵¹ In the Lied, Hagen is King Aldrian's biological son, while Hatto considers Aldrian to be the name

⁴⁵ Berners, chapter 24.

⁴⁶ Hatto, p. 17.

⁴⁷ Berners, chapter 22.

⁴⁸ Berners, chapter 24.

⁴⁹ Berners, chapter 21. A comma is amiss here: the introduction should read, 'the Dwarfe of the Fayry, Kinge Oberon'.

⁵⁰ Ruelle, p. 68; Grimm, II: 453; M. O'C. Walshe, *A Concise German Etymological Dictionary* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952) *sub* 'alp'.

⁵¹ Hatto discusses the character of Hagen/Högni in detail in his 'Appendix 4: the Genesis of the Poem', pp. 370-94.

of the elf and that it should equally be considered to be the name of the elf in *Piðrekssaga*, disregarding the fact that Hagen's father in the Lied is quite human.⁵² Interestingly, the name of Hagen's father in Wagner's opera *Der Ring des Nibelungen* ('The Ring of the Nibelungs') is none other than Alberich.⁵³ That the villains of the opera would be non-human would fit in with Wagner's general appreciation of the Other. Alberich also appears as the father of the title character in the German epic *Ortnit* (c.1230), while there are theories that Alberich was based on a historical person from the fifth century who was associated with the Merovingian dynasty.⁵⁴ *Albéric* is sometimes said to have been the son of Clodio and therefore possibly the half-brother of Merovech, the founder of the dynasty.⁵⁵ The proof for this is mostly non-existent: Ruelle, for example, calls on some place names and quote the two chroniclers of Merovingian history, Gregory of Tours and Fredegar, but no mention of an Albéric is found in their writing and even the figure of Merovech is so obscure that he is sometimes taken to be mythological.⁵⁶

Ruelle explains the name Auberon as originating from the light-elves of Germanic legend, "‘elfes de lumière’ des legends allemandes", adopted into French folklore.⁵⁷ *Elfe* is the modern French word for elf, pertaining to a human-sized being and used for both sexes, while *faerie* is gendered feminine and implies diminutiveness.⁵⁸ Keightley interprets *fée* as 'a woman skilled in magic', and puts suggests that the word should be understood as feminine.⁵⁹ Noel Williams expands on this etymology:

The identification firstly gives a noun *fai, fae, fay* referring to an individual female with supernatural powers, probably best translated as 'enchantress,' so that we must

⁵² Hatto, p. 401.

⁵³ Richard Wagner, *The Ring of the Nibelung*, trans. Andrew Porter (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977).

⁵⁴ Ruelle, pp. 68-69.

⁵⁵ Ruelle, p. 69.

⁵⁶ Ruelle, p. 69; For Merovingian history, see J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-haired Kings and Other Studies in Frankish History* (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 220.

⁵⁷ Ruelle, p. 69.

⁵⁸ Marie-Hélène Corréard and Valerie Grundy, *The Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary* (Paris: Hachette; Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) *sub* 'elfe'.

⁵⁹ Keightley, p. 6.

suppose that the substantive *faerie* is derived from this, meaning 'enchantment.' Later, this was again misunderstood or perhaps extended to signify 'fairyland,' and as a plural 'enchantresses,' whose singular was then mistakenly taken to be not *fay* but *faerie*.⁶⁰

The effeminacy and diminutiveness associated with the word fairy is not an invention of Romantic artistic portrayals but present from these first sources, although the flower fairy-type takes these features to an untenable extreme. Oberon's gender-trouble is present in most of his appearances in literature: despite being attributed with a horn in *Huon de Bordeaux*, he is not the generic elf-male who leads the Wild Hunt or violates maidens, as will be expanded on in relation to Shakespeare's Oberon in the next chapter.

Auberon is in *Huon de Bordeaux* a general benevolent supporter and functions more like Huon's fairy godfather than his equal. His role in the narrative is also to support Huon's challenge of Arthur, and he can in that role be compared with Merlin.⁶¹ Auberon also appears as ruler of Faerie in the early fourteenth century *chanson d'aventure* *Tristan de Nanteuil*. Tristan (not the knight of the Round Table) saves Gloriande from a dragon and is taken to Faerie where Auberon rules together with Morgan le Fay. Gloriande reveals to Tristan who his real parents are, and he goes in search of them equipped with a magical horn.⁶² In *Lion de Bourges*, Auberon appears to the title character first as a dwarf and then as a giant that Lion has to battle. Once he has proven himself worthy, Lion is taken to a castle to feast with 'Morgan the Fay and Arthur her lord, lovely Gloriande and King Auberon'.⁶³ *Chevalierie Ogier*, from the early thirteenth century, re-tells a story similar to that of Oisín and Niamh (discussed below). Ogier le Danois ('the Dane'), a popular hero from the *Chanson de Roland*, is shipwrecked beyond the Red Sea, and wanders unknowingly into Faerie, where he meets Morgan le Fay. Ogier is put through a series of tests by Arthur before he is allowed to marry

⁶⁰ Williams, 'The Semantics of the Word *Fairy*', p. 463.

⁶¹ William W. Kibler, 'Arthurian Ornament: Arthurian Material in Later Epic', in Glyn S. Burgess and Karen Pratt, eds, *The Arthur of the French* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), pp. 515-18 (p. 516).

⁶² Kibler, pp. 516-17. Cf. Neil Gaiman's *Stardust* discussed in chapter III.10.

⁶³ Kibler, p. 517.

Morgan. After two hundred years in Faerie, Ogier returns to France to serve King Philippe for a time, but is later restored to Faerie by Morgan.⁶⁴ *Gloriande*, and other varieties, are reoccurring names of those of 'the Fayrie'. There appears in *Huon de Bordeaux* a lady of Auberon's host called Glorianda, a knight called Gloriant or Gloriand, and a Gloriadas, master of the castle Adamant.⁶⁵ In these later Romances the name was usually applied to a female and appears prominently enough for Spenser to give his Faerie Queene the personal name *Gloriana*.

Auberon/Alberich alludes to two further kinds of characters: the diminutive Other and the Wild Man. The diminutive Other is different from the Insignificant Other (discussed in the next chapter) in that he/she is not patronised and/or mostly decorative: the dwarvish Auberon is relatively equal to mortals, noble and worthy of respect. Spence describes the belief in many native cultures that the soul of a human was a little person inside, which could be from a couple of inches tall, to dwarvish or pygmy-size, as an alternative to the belief in the insubstantial soul, which may relate to the spectral apparitions described in chapter 2.⁶⁶ The Wild Man as a Significant Other is one of the oldest concepts described in writing, and is preserved in the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, dated to the first centuries of the second millennium B.C.E.⁶⁷ Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, is semi-divine yet warmongering and lustful, and is thought to neglect his people. The gods then send him a double, the wild Enkidu, who is covered in hair and grazes on all fours like an animal, yet is said to be noble and 'beautiful like a god'.⁶⁸ Gilgamesh cares more for Enkidu than for his wife and son, who are mentioned only in passing, whilst Enkidu is called 'my friend, my younger brother', 'the faithful

⁶⁴ Kibler, p. 516.

⁶⁵ Berners, chapters 21-23 (Glorianda), 50ff. (Gloriant/Gloriand), 107 (Gloriadas).

⁶⁶ Spence, p. 70.

⁶⁷ N. K. Sandars, trans. and intro., *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p. 8.

⁶⁸ Sandars, pp. 61 and 67.

companion', and Gilgamesh's 'second self'.⁶⁹ Given this very early text, I would interpret the Significant Other, in its various guises, to be one of the most important fictional characters, and probably the one that says the most about the people who told stories about it.⁷⁰

viii. The Canterbury Tales

A use of the word 'elvish' to describe someone who is identified as Other is found in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (c.1386/7), and it is here applied to the poet's fictional self. The facts that the date of the text is specified and that the poet is identified allows for more certain conclusions as to what *elf* and *fairy* meant in England at this time. The text includes several references to elves, believed to have been included to lighten up the mood in-between the tales of a more serious nature.⁷¹ 'The Tale of Sir Thopas' is told by the Chaucer the pilgrim, who is introduced by the Host as

[...] waast in shape as wel as I;
This was a popet in an arm t'enbrace
For any woman, smal and fair of face.
He semeth elvyssh by his contenance,
For unto no wight dooth he daliaunce.⁷²

'Elvyssh' is by Benson glossed as 'abstracted (literally, mysterious, out of this world)'.⁷³ In this case it seems likely that Chaucer used the word to poke fun at himself, as 'The Tale of Sir Thopas' is a comic outing where the doughy knight Thopas falls in love with the queen of Faerie. At this time, the word does indeed designate a realm, as the phrase 'The contree of Fairye/So wilde' demonstrates.⁷⁴ The realm also does not only contain the Gentry-type as poor Sir Thopas immediately comes across a green giant, possibly a reference to *Sir Gawain*

⁶⁹ Sandars, pp. 98, 79 and 60.

⁷⁰ On the literary history of the Wild Man, see D. A. Wells, *The Wild Man from the 'Epic of Gilgamesh' to Hartmann von Aue's 'Iwein'* (Belfast: Queen's University of Belfast, 1975), and Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952).

⁷¹ J. A. Burrow, 'Elvish Chaucer', in M. Teresa Tavormina and R. F. Yeager, eds, *The Endless Knot: Essays on Old and Middle English in Honour of Marie Boroff* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), pp. 105-11 (pp. 106-7).

⁷² Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 'Prologue to Sir Thopas', ll.1890-1894, pp. 212-13.

⁷³ Benson in Chaucer, p. 213.

⁷⁴ Chaucer, 'The Tale of Sir Thopas', ll.1992-1993, p. 214.

and the *Green Knight*, discussed below. In 'The Tale of Sir Thopas', the object of the knight's desire is called both 'elf-queene' and 'queene of Fayerye', from which Burrow concludes that Chaucer makes no distinction between elf and fairy, yet because *fairy* can mean both a power and a place in *The Canterbury Tales*, there is no reason why Chaucer should not point out that its queen is also ethnically an elf.⁷⁵ Chaucer the pilgrim never gets a chance to finish the tale, as he is interrupted by the Host who cannot stand the silliness of it, and Chaucer goes on to narrate a more solemn tale with a Biblical motif, 'The Tale of Melibee'.

The second major appearance of elves in *The Canterbury Tales* is in 'The Wife of Bath's Tale'. Again *elf* and *fayrye* appear in conjunction: the Wife begins by describing the setting of the tale in the time of King Arthur when

Al was this land fulfild of fayrye.
The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye,
Daunced ful often in many a grene mede.⁷⁶

'Fayrye' is in the first line in the singular which makes it hard to translate as fairies: it should rather be taken to mean that 'the land was full of magic', or 'it was a magical land'. It should be noted that the land in question is already specified as Britain because of the mention of King Arthur, and that the tale refers to a time when the power of *fairy* was not contained within the realm of Faerie but was allowed to flow freely in the known world. The Wife of Bath explains that since holy friars have gone through the land and blessed it, there are now 'no fayryes' there.⁷⁷ The next line is, 'For ther as wont to walken was an elf', 'for where elves were accustomed to walk', which would make it easy to presume that the two words were synonyms. There would hardly be a reason for Chaucer to use two words for the same being in two consecutive lines, although the use of the words is partly motivated by their

⁷⁵ Chaucer, 'Sir Thopas', l.1980 and l.204, p. 214; J. A. Burrow, 'Explanatory Notes to the Prologue and Tale of Sir Thopas' in Chaucer, pp. 917-23 (p. 919).

⁷⁶ Chaucer, 'The Wife of Bath's Tale', ll. 858-860, p. 116.

⁷⁷ Chaucer, 'Wife of Bath', l.872, p. 117.

rhyming capabilities. The meaning in this case should be that in the process of banishing the *beings*, that is, the elves, from England, the friars have also put a stop to individual outbursts of the power which they control. *Fayeryes* can then be translated as ‘miracles’, ‘fits of magic’, evidently of a sort that is unacceptable to the Christian church. From Chaucer it can then finally be concluded that while *fayerye*, in the meaning magical influence or *wyrd*, once was commonly found, it was later banished into its own realm – not by praying friars as much as changing times. *Faerie* as a place and *fairy* as a being are interpretations of specific contexts, and the meaning has then been projected onto earlier sources that have been re-interpreted to show a continuum of the later meanings. The people of *the fayerye* and *elves* alike who have been mentioned up to this point in the thesis should be considered to be quite human. They have no evident non-human physical characteristics as of yet, while they do master magic. A problem is in the medieval concept of the *human*: the word was only commonly found in the English language as late as the fifteenth century, and then chiefly to mean ‘not divine’.⁷⁸

‘The Squire’s Tale’ poses some interesting questions about Chaucer’s use of *fairye*. Here, the protagonist is Cambyuskan, who is most often identified as Genghis Khan.⁷⁹ The Mongol ruler is visited at court by a strange knight

With so heigh reverence and obeisaunce,
As wel in speche as in contenaunce,
That Gawayn, with his old curteisye,
Though he were comen ayeyn out of Fairye,
Ne koude hym not amende with a word.⁸⁰

The knight is not at all from Faerie but from southern Arabia, but the connection is soon explained: he rides a ‘steed of brass’, which appears to be a mechanical construction that can

⁷⁸ *OED* sub ‘human’, 2.

⁷⁹ Vincent J. DiMarco, ‘Explanatory Notes to The Squire’s Prologue and Tale’, in Chaucer, pp. 890-95 (p. 891).

⁸⁰ Chaucer, ‘The Squire’s Tale’, ll.93-97, p. 170.

fly.⁸¹ The horse is said to be ‘a fairye’, clearly here not meaning a person but ‘a marvel’, as it is glossed by Benson.⁸² The phrasing ‘comen ayeyn out of Fairye’ suggests that by Chaucer’s time, Faerie was perceived to be a realm. Another reason for the knight to be associated with fairy is the mention of Gawain in the passage above: it seems that Chaucer alludes to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c.1400).⁸³ The date of the surviving version in the *Pearl* manuscript makes it impossible for Chaucer to have known of that version, while the combination of the mentions of Gawain and *fayrie* and the event of an unknown knight who interrupts a dinner indicates that he might have heard the story in some form. Both the interrupting knights are foreign in appearance, yet Gawain does not have to travel abroad to reach the land of the Green Knight: he need only go as far as the Wirral.⁸⁴ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, based on French sources originating from the middle of the twelfth century, features an elf-character that departs from the norm of elves being indistinguishable from humans: the Green Knight is green, to begin with. The reaction of the people in Arthur’s hall when he walks in is described as ‘Forþi for fantoum and fayryȝe þe folk þere it demed’, which Barron translates as ‘and so the people present thought it illusion and enchantment’.⁸⁵ Interestingly, Tolkien translates this as ‘wherefore a phantom and fay-magic folk there thought it’:⁸⁶ he considers the Green Knight to possess fay-magic because he is a fay, not that he should be considered to be a fay or a fairy because he possesses that power.

The phrasing *fairy elves* is then not a double-statement: it refers specifically to elves that possess the power of fairy. This does not necessarily suggest that there are non-magical elves, but that the phrasing was used when people might have know of both *elf* as a being and

⁸¹ DiMarco in Chaucer, p. 892.

⁸² Benson, note to l.201, Chaucer, p. 171.

⁸³ Tolkien, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, p. 1.

⁸⁴ W. R. J. Barron, ed., intro. and trans., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974), p. 11.

⁸⁵ Barron, l.240, p. 40, trans. p. 41.

⁸⁶ Tolkien, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, p. 24.

fairy as a power. The Green Knight is indeed called ‘an aluish mon’, an elvish man, at one point, but never ‘a fairy’, while he possesses that power.⁸⁷ It is clear that the word *fairy* was popularised in the English language during the fourteenth century and that by the time Chaucer was writing, it was quite established that elves possessed the power of *fairy*.

Chaucer does indicate that the word was beginning to mean a place. A problem of understanding the medieval meaning of *fairy* might be the change in the spelling of the word: in the development from *fayrre* and similar spellings to *fairy*, the word loses a syllable. It might be easier to understand the meaning magic or fate if the word is shown in a hypothetical modernisation, *fay-ery*. The problem with this is that it implies that *fay* is properly a being: Keightley concludes rather erroneously that

as a Nonnerie was a place inhabited by Nonnes, a Jewerie a place inhabited by Jews, so a Faerie was naturally a place inhabited by Fays.⁸⁸

A more suitable comparison would perhaps be to wizardry or druidry, though as this is practiced by wizards and druids, *fay-ery* still implies an activity practiced by Fays.

ix. Applications of the word ‘fairy’

As the name of a realm, *Faerie* is usually presumed to be the home of the ‘fays’. ‘Fay’, ‘fae’, ‘faery’, and other variations, are sometimes used by both scholars and writers as a more ‘proper’ name for the inhabitants of *Faerie*, most of them disagreeing on the correct spelling and favouring their own version.⁸⁹ The problem remains that none of these words refer to a being in medieval texts: being ‘fay’ means being affected by the power of *fairy*, and never designates a race. There are no instances of someone being ‘a fay’ or ‘a fairy’ in medieval texts, while the later meanings are commonly projected onto them. The modern spelling was popularised at the end of the eighteenth century, and the use of obsolete version of the word may suggest a desire to refer to a being present before the nineteenth-century drive to record

⁸⁷ Barron, 1.681, p. 62.

⁸⁸ Keightley, p. 9.

⁸⁹ The preference for obsolete spellings is noted in the *OED*, *sub* ‘faery, faerie’.

(and thereby recreate and standardise) the folklore of the British Isles. These alternative spellings are not used for the same reason as Tolkien's preferred *faërie*, as a name for a human-sized being, as fays, etc. in modern use mostly refer to a diminutive, winged being. The Significant Other can be called *elf* or *fairy*, depending on the definition of the word, while both can also signify a diminutive being. An elf can be as different from another elf as a dwarf from a giant: the words *elf* and *fairy* cannot be taken to correctly denominate a certain character. Furthermore, the Significant Other can denominate an elf or a fairy, or an alien, vampire, angel or demon, or any being that is mostly humanoid and considered as an equal to humans for that matter. It would be possible to see a diminutive, dwarfish, monstrous or animal-like being as an equal, although this is rarely found in medieval texts: Alberich/Auberon and the Green Knight might be exceptions and could indicate that physical Otherness would be allowed if the person is identified as an elf or *of fairy*. It should be remembered that much of what is known about elves and fairies, and indeed other beings of that sort, has been filtered through nineteenth-century writers' ideas of nationalism and eugenics.⁹⁰ The attitude towards the elf-character changes dramatically in the break between the medieval period and the Renaissance, and the beings later called elves and fairies are quite unrecognisable when they reappear in the texts of Shakespeare and later writers.

⁹⁰ It would be impossible not to mention the Grimm Brothers' work in relation to the growth of nationalism, and the efforts in many European countries to do the same, as many of these works are referred to in this thesis. Squire, for example, uses the word 'Aryan' to refer to a race (pp. 31-44), while Rydberg differentiates between language and ethnicity but does use phrasings that would be considered unsuitable today. Viktor Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, trans. Rasmus B. Anderson (London: S. Sonnenschein & Co., 1889). D. A. MacManus begins *The Middle Kingdom* by making some rather eye-catching racial distinctions considering the late date of the text (London: Max Parrish, 1959), pp. 13-14.

Chapter 4: The Insignificant Other in Poetic Tradition

i. Fairy as a name for a diminutive being

The difference between the medieval tradition of the people of *the fairy* and the fairies of Renaissance texts is great enough for the latter to be considered to begin a new tradition.

While Chaucer refers to beings of belief, the fairies of Shakespeare seem to have no precedence. The lack of sources of elves and fairies in the intermittent period presents a problem: Keightley, for example, finds no examples of such beings between Chaucer and Shakespeare.¹ Arthurian narratives continued to be moderately popular, yet the people of *the fairy* – Morgan le Fay and her compatriots in Avalon – are to a lesser extent called fairies as the meaning of the word had begun to change to being the name of a diminutive being. The fact that Morgan's epithet is preserved while she is not usually called a fairy does give clues to what is happening to the word: she remains *fay* but as the word begins to refer to a being only when it is diminutive, she remains 'Morgan the Enchantress' rather than 'Morgan the Fairy'. 'Enchantress' remains an acceptable translation of fairy until quite late, as already mentioned by Williams, and is applied by Keats to his *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, discussed below.

The diminutive fairies that begin to appear during the Renaissance are developed according to the fashion of the day, although it is not clear where the smallness originates from. Shakespeare might have just made use of and helped to spread a being that was already in fashion, as there is no preserved text that can be readily identified as his source. As the word became fashionable, it came to mean something mostly unrelated to the earlier meaning of a power of magic and fate, and it can be considered that a new tradition of fairies emerges during the fifteenth century. This entails that *fairy* now

1. Refers to a being instead of a power and a place.

¹ Keightley, pp. 321-25.

2. Refers to a diminutive or otherwise insignificant being that is bereft of any equality to humans.
3. Is used as the correct English word for any type of supernatural being independent of cultural context that had hitherto been known under different, often local, names.
4. And that *the fairy* is now interpreted as referring to one individual being rather than 'the power'. This meaning is then projected onto earlier sources to fabricate a history of fairies according to the definition above, something frequently repeated by folklore scholars.²

Although there is a lack of records of folk beliefs in the sixteenth century, it seems likely that Shakespeare's appreciation of fairies was not related to belief, as Latham points out, and should be considered to be mostly fabricated.³ There are a number of problems with Shakespeare's fairies: to begin with, there seems to be no English folk belief in diminutive fairies, and those of Shakespeare are rather imported and adapted to the fashion of the time. In a typical move for his time, Shakespeare borrows names and characters from a number of traditions and labels all of them *fairies*, with the most problematic of them being Titania, as discussed below. The generalisation of any supernatural being as a fairy and the translation of a number of non-English words such as *nymph* and *faun* as *fairy* complicate things further. Borrowings from Greek and Roman mythology are particularly difficult: the intention of English Renaissance writers was to make England seem like the heir to the Classical world rather than the more rustic Anglo-Saxons and Celts. Furthermore, the use of the French word to name these beings resolutely points to Shakespeare's fairies being conflated from such a variety of sources that they should be considered to be fabricated. However, Shakespeare's

² See for example the discussion of Jabez Allie's list of fairies in chapter 10.

³ Minor White Latham, *Elizabethan Fairies: the Fairies of Folklore and the Fairies of Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), p. 1. 'Fabricated' is the word I will use to refer to what is made up, perhaps with elements of correct information but mostly fallaciously used.

use of them has contributed to their sense of Englishness, as Latham notes.⁴ There seems to be a case for blaming the bard for the silliness of fairies, as Tolkien already has established.

He says of the word *Elves* that he is

Intending the word to be understood in its ancient meaning, which continued as late as Spenser – a murrain on Will Shakespeare and his damned cobwebs.⁵

ii. Elizabethan Fairies

As Latham observes, Elizabethan fairies were only loosely connected to those of Romance, and it because of the lack of material from this time, it is unclear if there were diminutive, or in other ways insignificant, fairies found in writing before Shakespeare.⁶ The ‘ladies of the fayry’ mentioned by Thomas Elyot in 1559 correlate better with the people of the ‘fayrye’ of French Chansons de Geste and Romances than with the vegetable spirits of Shakespeare.

Fairies were properly diminutive as early as 1627, as they are found in Michael Drayton’s *Nymphidia, or the Court of Fairy*. However, the change in the meaning of *fairy* is not only a change in their size: the word does not seem to refer to a being at all before this change, as it does not in Chaucer, and so *fairy* can technically be considered as a proper name for a diminutive being. The reason why the power of *the fairy* was made corporeal in the form of a diminutive being is quite clear: diminutive fairies are only one category among many that were objectionable during the Renaissance witch craze. Edward Fairfax wrote in 1621 that

Yet in this flourishing time of the Gospel, and in this clear day of knowledge, it cannot but offend the conscience of every zealous Christian to see the people of God still buried in the night of superstition, and lie dead in the grave of paganism; so many are the strange follies, rooted in the opinion of the vulgar, concerning the walking of souls in this or that house, the dancing of Fairies on this rock or that mountain, the changing of infants in their cradles, and the like.⁷

Renaissance fairies were offensive to Christianity because they must necessarily be

categorised as demonic as they have lost the semblance to angels that earlier elf-characters

⁴ Latham, p. 11.

⁵ Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 143 (letter 131 to Milton Waldman, 1951).

⁶ Latham, p. 26n14.

⁷ Fairfax in Latham, pp. 31-2.

had. One might consider the increasing disappearance of helpful and protective female spirits such as White Ladies and the first appearances of female angels, in particular as guardian angels – there are no female angels in the Bible or in later Christian, Jewish or Islamic traditions. At the same time the word was explored and scientific thinking was rising at the same rate as the will to dominate non-Europeans. If no being matching the popular description of the diminutive fairy was found in the world, it can surely not exist, and the belief in it could therefore be ridiculed further. Superstition was reserved for the ‘vulgar’, the poor and rural population of England, about whom John Webster wrote in 1676

if they chance to have any sort of the Epilepsie, Palsie, Convulsions or the like, do presently perswade themselves that they are bewitched, forespoken, blasted, fairy-taken, or haunted with some evil spirit, and the like; and if you should by plain reasons shew them, that they are deceived, and that there is no such matter, but that it is a natural disease[.]⁸

iii. *The Faerie Queene*

The popularity of fairies in the Elizabethan period seems to have come about by accident. In 1575, an entertainment was performed for the queen at Kenilworth by her then suitor, the earl of Leicester.⁹ Elizabeth was delighted, and subsequently similar spectacles were performed in a variety of locations up to the 1590s. The height of the performance was often the appearance of the Fairy Queen, made to represent Elizabeth herself. It is likely that Edmund Spenser began his tribute to Elizabeth, *The Faerie Queene*, as early as 1579, by which time it was clear that the queen approved of this identification.¹⁰ *The Faerie Queene* is an allegory in which the elfin knights represent ‘twelve morall virtues’,¹¹ and was meant to ‘fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline’.¹² Woodcock calls this more precisely ‘elf-fashioning’: the education of young men and women into courteous and

⁸ Webster in Latham, p. 33.

⁹ A. C. Hamilton in Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton [1590, 1596] (Harlow: Pearson, 2007), p. 19.

¹⁰ Hamilton in Spenser, p. xv.

¹¹ Spenser, p. 2.

¹² Spenser, p. 2.

responsible members of society where the fairies are set out as the ideal.¹³

The fairy element in *The Faerie Queene* has been ignored by most critics on the grounds that the poem is allegorical.¹⁴ Elvin Greenlow argues that

By 'fairy', Spenser means *Welsh*, or, more accurately, *Tudor*, as distinguished from the general term British.¹⁵

Gloriana and her line are in Spenser's text immigrants from the Otherworld who have come to Britain to enlighten its people with their magic and radiance. Because of her supernatural origin, Gloriana 'all earthly princes [...] doth far surmount', pointing out her superiority to the British prince Arthur:¹⁶ here, the allegorical version of the living Elizabeth surmounts the mythological Arthur. However, the Faerie Queene, like her real-life counterpart, takes every opportunity to expand her kingdom, here back into Fairyland. Elizabeth Jane Bellamy identifies the text as

A key document of Eurocentrism, self-consciously written in the idiom of an 'elect nation' and a literary work profoundly implicated in the social formations of western Europe (such as the rise of the concept of nationhood and the rise of territorial imperialism in England's transition from 'saluage wilderness' to empire)[.]¹⁷

Bellamy notes that Spenser's Fairyland is indeed not located in the known world yet 'is conceived as a locus that can presumably, albeit with some difficulty, be *found*.'¹⁸

Gloriana's claim to authority is supported by the genealogy found in a book called 'Antiquitee of Faery Lond' (sic), read by Sir Guyon in Alma's castle.¹⁹ Guyon, being ethnically elvish, chooses this 'ample volume' out of a great library, while the British prince

¹³ Matthew Woodcock, *Fairy in The Faerie Queene: Renaissance Elf-fashioning and Elizabethan Myth-Making* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. vii.

¹⁴ Woodcock, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵ Greenlow in Woodcock, p. 120.

¹⁶ Spenser, II.x.1.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Jane Bellamy, 'Spenser's Fairyland and the Curious Genealogy of India', in Patrick Cheney and Lauren Silberman, eds, *Worldmaking Spenser: Explorations in the Early Modern Age* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), pp. 177-92 (p. 177).

¹⁸ Bellamy, p. 182.

¹⁹ Spenser, II.x.70-76.

Arthur selects *Briton Moniments*, which in a similar way recounts his own genealogy.²⁰ The legendary tome of elvish history is snappily summed up in only six stanzas, mostly because the contents is fabricated rather than adapted from earlier texts and belief. In the *Antiquitee* it is told that the first man 'Elfe', and the first woman, 'Fay', were created by the Prometheus (from Greek mythology), while no such reference is commonly found in elvish myths of origin. The only familiar name out of the genealogy is Oberon, while the spelling of the name clearly indicates that Shakespeare lifted it wholly from this text.²¹ Woodcock observes that

The topos of the mythical genealogy is not restricted to purely literary works; the use of the marvellous to explain an individual's greatness or singularity is found in medieval historiographical and hagiographical tradition, and provides the model for many of the more fantastic elements that Geoffrey of Monmouth incorporates in his *Historia Regum Britanniae*.²²

In its allegorical form, the *Antiquitee* can be perceived as an elvish *Brut*, that is, as a presentation of history intertwined with myth. In the sense that only six stanzas are presented to the reader out of the vast volume, it may well represent the metaphorical elvish library mentioned above, where very little of the knowledge of elves and fairies is made accessible to the reader. While *The Faerie Queene* is also part of this library, being a text concerned with elves and fairies, it is also clear that Spenser's take on history renegotiates their status. Spenser is not concerned about reprisals from the elves if he uses them for his own needs, neither is Shakespeare. They no longer have any spiritual authority over writers in general, and I would therefore suggest *The Faerie Queene* is the first real literary appearance of elves where they are clearly separated from belief.

iv. A Midsummer Night's Dream

The confounding of different mythological traditions and the translation of many different

²⁰ Spenser, II.x.70.

²¹ The first part of *The Faerie Queene* was printed in 1590, while *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is believed to have been written in 1594-95. Paster and Howard in William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Gail Kern Paster and Skiles Howard (Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1999), p. xiii.

²² Woodcock, p. 117.

beings as fairies further add to this new freedom for writers to adapt the character according to their own needs. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare borrows Oberon from Lord Berner's translation of *Huon de Bordeaux*, the spelling having already been modified by Spenser. Titania is picked out of Arthur Golding's 1565 translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where he re-classifies Ovid's nymphs as fairies.²³ It is likely that Shakespeare is referring to Diana as a female Titan, as no person called Titania is mentioned in Ovid's text. While this royal couple are found in a forest outside Athens, there is one character that has an English origin. Robin Goodfellow has been tracked to thirteenth-century English folklore and it is likely that Shakespeare adapted the character, by him also known as Puck, from the tract containing the ballad 'Robin Good-fellow; his Mad Prankes, and Merry Jests', published before 1588.²⁴ Shakespeare's play was printed in 1600 and has been dated to 1594-95, and like the ballad refers to Robin as 'knavish', points out his powers of transformation, and has retained the catchphrase 'ho, ho, ho!' on the one occasion.²⁵ The ballad is often attributed to Ben Jonson, but the evidence for a printing before 1588 provided by Collier makes this impossible.²⁶ Jonson did produce a literary offshoot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the masque *Oberon, the Fairy Prince*, first performed in 1611.²⁷ Robin indeed seems human-sized in the ballad, but among Oberon's retainers is Tom Thumb, who does seem to be the only diminutive in the company.²⁸ Robin also sings of 'Elves, urchins, goblins all, and little fairyes' so it is conceivable that fairies were believed to vary in

²³ Ovid, *The Fifteen Books of Ovid's Metamorphoses*, trans. Arthur Golding (London: William Seres, 1567), l.859-60, VI.579-581. See also Margo Hendricks, "'Obscured by dreams": Race, Empire, and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47.1 (Spring 1996), 37-60 (p. 46); Diane Purkiss, *Troublesome Things: a History of Fairies and Fairy Stories* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 177; Spence, p. 138.

²⁴ J. Payne Collier, ed. and intro., *The Mad Pranks and Merry Jests of Robin Goodfellow: Reprint of the Edition of 1628* (London: Reprinted for the Percy Society by C. Richards, 1891), pp. vi-vii.

²⁵ Collier, p. vii; Paster and Howard in Shakespeare, *Dream*, p. xiii; Shakespeare, *Dream*, 2.i.32-58, 3.ii.421.

²⁶ Paster and Howard in Shakespeare, *Dream*, pp. 309-10; Collier, p. vi.

²⁷ Ben Johnson, *Oberon, the Fairy Prince: a Masque of Prince Henry's*, in *The Works of Ben Jonson* (London: Thomas Hodgkin, 1692), pp. 359-63.

²⁸ Collier, p. xix, p. 31, pp. 44-45.

size at this time, as illustrators of Shakespeare often portray them.²⁹ However, Latham concludes that

Had the diminutiveness or perceptible smallness of the fairies been as pronounced a characteristic of the race in 1577 as today, it would have been almost impossible to have confused them with goddesses whose figures were never represented as undersize.³⁰

The fact remains that fairies were performed by actors. Titania would most certainly have been played by a boy, but it is not clear if Oberon, Puck and Titania's retainers were performed by boys or grown men. The appreciation of the size of Shakespeare's fairies has varied over time, which is clearly demonstrated in illustrations from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In a number of paintings by Henry Fuseli, the fairies appear in various sizes and guises, sometimes mostly human, sometimes monstrous, likewise are they represented in illustrations by Edward Landseer and Joseph Noel Paton.³¹ Joshua Reynolds' 'Puck' (1789) portrays what seems to be the first pointed-eared elf, being the only beastly feature preserved from the faun or hobgoblin from the ballad.³² The problem for illustrators remains the necessity of Titania and Oberon to be in size equivalent to Bottom, which is usually solved by letting the other fairies be smaller than the royals, while Bottom is sometimes portrayed as somewhat bigger than the fairies, such as in Fuseli's 'Titania's Awakening'.³³

The difference in size and the non-human features of some of the fairies in illustrations refer to the 'exotic' nature of the fairies in the play. Margo Hendricks points out an important connection between the fairies, and Oberon in particular, and the Indian boy. She cites Thomas Hahn as saying that India at this time referred not only to the Indian sub-continent or even Asia, but to the Americas as well, and may be seen as a general term for

²⁹ Collier, p. 38.

³⁰ Latham, p. 72.

³¹ Stuart Sillars, *Painting Shakespeare: the Artist as Critic, 1720-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 228-38.

³² Sillars, pp. 206-10.

³³ Sillars, p. 232.

regions that were not part of the 'civilised' world. Auberon is in *Huon de Bordeaux* said to be king of Momur, which is described as being in the part of the world known as India at that time:³⁴ Shakespeare's Oberon is not only a supernatural Other, he is also a foreigner.

Hendricks supports Kim Hall's suggestion that modern perceptions of race are in large parts the result of lingering notions of 'difference' that resided at the intersections of English travel and trade, plantation, empire, and science in the early modern period.³⁵

Furthermore, the fairies are also associated with darkness, and are described as nocturnal:

And we Fairies, that do run,
By the triple Hecate's team,
From the presence of the Sun,
Following darkness like a dream³⁶

Puck calls Oberon 'King of shadows',³⁷ while he himself, as a Trickster-character, would correspond to

Old Nick, Satan, the Devil, who is also, sometimes, Oberon. 'The Prince of Darkness is a gentleman', we believe (King Lear, III.iv.140), as long as he is respectfully addressed, for what matters is *how* he is spoken to.³⁸

Fairies and elves have been described as obscure or shadowy in the past, but Shakespeare adapts this meaning as fluttering spirits that are mere fantasy rather than those that exist but cannot be properly described. The whole play is clearly labelled 'dream' and Puck even apologises for any interference in the audience's sense of reality:

³⁴ Hendricks, p. 46.

³⁵ Hall in Hendricks, p. 43-44.

³⁶ Shakespeare, *Dream*, 5.i.359-62.

³⁷ Shakespeare, *Dream*, 3.ii.347.

³⁸ Richard Wilson, 'The Kindly Ones: the Death of the Author in Shakespearian Athens', in Richard Dutton, ed., *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Contemporary Critical Essays* (Houndmills and London: MacMillan, 1996), pp. 198-222 (p. 213).

If we shadows have offended,
 Think but this (and all is mended)
 That you have but slumber'd here,
 While these visions did appear.
 And this weak and idle theme,
 No more yielding than a dream,
 Gentles, do not reprehend.
 If you pardon, we will mend.³⁹

v. *Queen Mab*

Shakespeare had previously made reference to fairies in other plays. Queen Mab appears in a speech by Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*, where her size is specified as 'no bigger than an agate-stone' and that 'her chariot is an empty hazel-nut' and the speech serves to establish Mercutio's character as dreamer.⁴⁰ Mab is the English form of Medb, the Queen of Connacht and CuChullain's enemy in the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* ('The Cattle-raid of Coolidge').⁴¹ Shakespeare's use of her might demonstrate the English opinion of Irish mythology at the time: Mab's size of less than an inch in height shows how insignificant the Other had become during the time of British Imperialism: Mab is made into the Insignificant Other. Shakespeare would have presumed that fairies did not exist – there are no elements of belief in his portrayal of them. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* they are characters like any others, and in *Romeo and Juliet* Mercutio's speech about Mab serves to point out his somewhat eccentric character, for believing in such things. He is, in Romeo's words, 'A gentleman [...] that loves to hear himself talk',⁴² and may be an indication towards the later perception of the interest in fairies as a gentleman's pastime.

The Romantic tradition of fairies still suffered from their earlier poetic treatment, although a few attempts were made to refer to an alternative image than the flower-fairy sort.

³⁹ Shakespeare, *Dream*, 5.i.399-406.

⁴⁰ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.iv.55. For fairies in relation to Shakespeare, see Katharine Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck: An Examination of Fairy Beliefs among Shakespeare's Contemporaries and Successors* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), in particular pp. 44-56.

⁴¹ Thomas Kinsella, *The Táin* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

⁴² Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 2.iv.123-24.

Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Queen Mab* (1813) is a defence and re-establishment of Mab, where she is likened more to a light apparition or White Woman than the diminutive figure of Shakespeare. He offers a detailed description of her:

The Fairy's frame was slight, yon fibrous cloud,
That catches but the pales tinge of even,
And which the straining eye can hardly seize
When melting into eastern twilight's shadow,
Were scarce so thin, so slight; but the fair star
Sheds not a light so mild, so powerful,
That gems the glittering coronet of morn,
As that which, bursting from the Fairy's form,
Spread a purpureal halo round the scene,
Yet with an undulating motion,
Swayed to her outline gracefully.⁴³

In Shelley's account, Mab is the keeper of 'The wonders of the human world',⁴⁴ representing the spirit of nature who educates the human Soul, a thinking typical to the Romantic movement. *Queen Mab* is in many ways a vehicle for Shelley's own opinions: he would have known of the Irish Medb, being politically pro-Irish, and of the White Women or light apparitions, although his use of fairy should be seen as figurative. Shelley was opposed to organised religion much like Blake, thinking that Anglican Christianity de-mystified faith and rather believed in a kind of spirituality that could not be that easily represented.⁴⁵

vi. Romantic Poetry

The idea of fairies as representing the 'indescribable', as in Tolkien's interpretation of Faerie, seems to have been of significance to the Romantic poets. To William Blake, the fairies were at least as real as angels and demons, and his use of them is mainly as 'spirits of sexual delight - "rulers of the vegetable world" like those of Chaucer and Shakespeare.'⁴⁶ Blake's

⁴³ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Freistat (London: Norton, 2002), p. 19.

⁴⁴ Shelley, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 21.

⁴⁵ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Queen Mab 1813* (Oxford and New York: Woodstock Books, 1990), pp. iii-iv. Cf. Keats' 'Negative Capability' and Tolkien's defence of Fantasy, below.

⁴⁶ Samuel Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (Hanover, NH: Published for Brown University Press by University Press of New England, 1988), p. 136. See also John Adlard,

'Long John Brown and Little Mary Bell' stands out as his most sexually explicit use of the fairy:

Little Mary Bell had a Fairy in a nut,
Long John Brown had the Devil in his gut;
Long John Brown lov'd little Mary Bell,
And the Fairy drew the Devil into the nutshell.

Her Fairy skipp'd out and her Fairy skipp'd in;
He laugh'd at the Devil saying, 'Love is a sin.'⁴⁷

Surely a sexual spirit, but of which sex? The male fairy is in 'A Fairy leapt upon my knee', a 'Disgracer of the female form',⁴⁸ and all other of Blake's fairies are male, including Little Mary Bell's. Are we meant to believe that Blake means that any sexual desire, even that of women, is gendered male? A clearer picture is presented in the poems of John Keats: here, the fairy still represents sexual desire, but is clearly gendered female. In 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci: A Ballad', the fairy is a succubus, and her victim a valiant knight. He is taken to her 'elfin grot' and there bereft of all power. Miriam Allott says,

The poem is obviously connected with K[ean]s feelings about Fanny Brawne and is strongly influenced by memories of Spenser's fatal enchantress in *The Faerie Queene* and by various traditional ballads expressing the destructiveness of love[.]⁴⁹

Keats's view of sex is complicated: on the one hand, he felt awkward in the presence of women and was not too happy about his poetry appealing to them;⁵⁰ on the other, he may have recognised that his own lack of stature and status, being five foot tall and the son of an ostler, might have been interpreted as effeminate. Upon being called 'quite the little poet', he

The Sports of Cruelty: Fairies, Folk-songs, Charms and Other country Matters in the Work of William Blake (London: Cecil and Amelia Woolf, 1972).

⁴⁷ William Blake, *Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), p. 178.

⁴⁸ Blake, *Selected Poems*, p. 127

⁴⁹ Miriam Allott in John Keats, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Miriam Allott (London: Longman, 1975), p. 500. Fanny Brawne was the lady Keats admired. For Keats's use of fairies, see also Christine Gallant, *Keats and Romantic Celticism* (Houndmills and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁵⁰ Susan J. Wolfson, 'Feminising Keats', in Peter J. Kitson, ed., *Coleridge, Keats and Shelley: Contemporary Critical Essays* (Houndmills and London: MacMillan, 1996), pp. 92-113 (p. 106). For Keats's opinion of women, see John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats*, 2 vols, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1958), I: 341-42.

wrote to his brother and his wife, 'You see what it is to be under six foot and not a lord'.⁵¹

Keats's view of women was particularly idealised, yet he was attracted to this idea of femininity:

who is to say between Man and Woman which is the most delighted? [...] let us open out leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive - budding patiently under the eye of Apollo and taking hints from eve[r]y noble insect that favours us with a visit.⁵²

This comment brings a whole new meaning to flower-fairies: in Keats' meaning, they are beings directly manifesting the female libido. Leaves, flowers, and the female sex occur elsewhere in Keats's poetry: in 1816 he mentions in a poem in a letter to Charles Clarke, 'lovely Una in a leafy nook', refers to the character in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.⁵³ The speaker of 'Had I a man's fair form' is thought by J. Burke Severs to be a fairy,⁵⁴ saying that he is 'no knight whose foeman dies' nor a 'happy shepherd of the dell',⁵⁵ but still wants to be loved by a woman for his ability to love, not for his external conditions: Keats may well here be commenting on his own 'elfin' physique. There is further support that Keats saw himself as 'Other' and marginalized, as in Susan J. Wolfson's feminist analysis, where she points out that Keats was frequently effeminised and infantilised by his critics, but was popular among women, in particular later in the century, when his whole person and tragic death was appropriated into an innocent victim-character.⁵⁶ This might be because the 'official' meaning of fairy was seen as personifications of innocence, sweetness and purity by the Victorians, completely ignoring Keats's use of the fairy-character as an analogy of female sexuality ('elfin grot', 'leafy shade'). The unfinished 'The Cap and Bells; or, the Jealousies' is an attempt at a Draytonesque narrative poem dealing with quite dainty fairies which however appear to be human-size because of the suggestion of sexual relations with humans.

⁵¹ Keats, *Letters*, I: 61.

⁵² Keats, *Letters*, I: 232.

⁵³ Keats, *Letters*, I: 110.

⁵⁴ J. Burke Severs, 'Keats's Fairy Sonnet', *Keats-Shelley Journal* VI (1957), 109-13.

⁵⁵ Keats, *Complete Poems*, p. 32.

⁵⁶ Wolfson, p. 95, pp. 96-97.

'Elf' is a favourite word of Keats, as noted by Allott,⁵⁷ and not necessarily used as a name for a supernatural being, but rather favoured for its rhyming possibilities, particularly the elf-self coupling, which may be of poetic necessity or could have a more substantial meaning as the elf being the person mirroring the self.⁵⁸ Keats's fondness for elves and fairies is mainly due to his admiration for Spenser, whom he calls 'the elfin poet'.⁵⁹ He poses a question to Spenser asking if there is any escape from the toils of the earth (that is, going to Faerie), and answers himself that there is not an easy way, but he will keep his hopes up 'for thine honour and his pleasure'.⁶⁰ Upon receiving his fatal diagnosis of tuberculosis, Keats wrote 'Ode to a Nightingale' where he laments the death of the Romantic imagination:

...The same that oft-times hath
 Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
 Of perilous seas in fairy lands forlorn.

Forlorn! The very word is like a bell
 To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
 Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well
 As she is fabled to do, deceiving elf.⁶¹

vii. *Faerie as the imagination*

Keats's use of Faerie to mean the realm of the imagination fits in with his concept of

Negative Capability:

I have not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind & at once it stuck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed (*sic*) so enormously - I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason...⁶²

The use of Faerie as the realm of the imagination died with Keats. Fairies and elves were

⁵⁷ Keats, *Complete Poems*, p. 182.

⁵⁸ See also Kingsley Amis, 'The Curious Elf, A Note on Rhyme in Keats', *Essays in Criticism*, 1.2 (1951), 189-92.

⁵⁹ In 'Spenser! A jealous honourer of thine', Keats, *Complete Poems*, p. 309.

⁶⁰ Keats, *Complete Poems*, p. 309.

⁶¹ Keats, *Letters*, I: 531-32. Cf. Tolkien's use of the 'Perilous Realm' as a name for Faerie or Elfland. See also William A. Ulmer, 'Adonais and the Death of Poetry', in Peter J. Kitson, ed., *Coleridge, Keats and Shelley: Contemporary Critical Essays* (Houndmills and London: MacMillan, 1996) pp. 202-25.

⁶² Keats, *Letters*, I: 193.

demoted from poetic uses to be deemed suitable for children, forgetting or ignoring the sexual symbolism of Blake and Keats. No doubt this degrading of the imagination was due to an increasingly industrialized world where the real, in the sense of the scientifically provable, was favoured. As a representative for the imagination, the elf-figure was only upgraded again in Tolkien's writing. He remarks that, 'Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image of a Maker.'⁶³ Raging against the definition of the real as his contemporary, industrial world, he says,

The notion that motor-cars are more 'alive' than, say, centaurs or dragons is curious: that they are more 'real' than, say, horses is pathetically absurd. How real, how startlingly alive is a factory chimney compared with an elm-tree: poor obsolete thing, insubstantial dream of an escapist!⁶⁴

It would be 116 years from the death of Keats to the publication of *The Hobbit*, during which time the image of the elf, then mostly called fairy, grew particularly strange. This strangeness is not contained in the figure itself, but the variety of interpretations: at once, the fairy-character is small, winged and sweet *in absurdum*, while in other accounts, it shows a desire to be re-established in its human size. Tolkien's explanation for the daintiness of fairies as being caused by increasing industrialisation and a sense of loss of the (mainly imagined) natural world and its spiritual aspects will be highly relevant when considering the diverse texts of the next chapter.

⁶³ Tolkien, 'On Fairy-stories', p. 50.

⁶⁴ Tolkien, 'On Fairy-stories', p. 55.

Chapter 5: The End and the Beginning

i. Fairies and Children

This chapter will discuss a number of texts produced in the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, more specifically the period from the death of Keats in 1821 to the publication of the first volume of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* in 1954. As this is a period of immense change in many ways, the literature produced is very diverse. Some themes are, however, prevalent, namely the culmination and later decline of the diminutive fairy, and the increasing popularity of the human-sized elf, the further Anglicisation of these figures, and the concept of a bibliography of the literary history of elves. I take the title of the chapter from the first of these themes. As said in the previous chapter, while Romantic poets like Blake and Keats used the diminutive fairy as a spirit of sexual delight, the same character one generation later was considered suitable for children. The Victorian and Edwardian fairy is an example of the constant re-fashioning of the elf-character: the winged, delicate, and very small being was now an image of the cult of the child in the nineteenth century. As Diane Purkiss puts it,

Children had to be dreamy and sensitive, gazing into corners and peopling them with supernatural beings, in order to qualify as appropriately childlike. Any resistance to this behaviour was regarded as precocity and ruthlessly shunned. It is just as burdensome to be obligated to see fairies lurking around every corner as it is to be obligated not to see them.¹

The perception of flower-fairies as unrelated to earlier accounts of fairies, Celtic *sidhe*, Germanic elves, or French *fées*, is to emphasise their Britishness, with Englishness implied. Nicola Bown lists village folklore, Shakespeare, and Romantic poetry as the sources for the Victorian fairy, mentioning Scotland and Ireland only in relation to Nationalism.² Bown defines the word fairy as Victorian flower-fairy specifically, which would indeed make

¹ Purkiss, p. 255.

² Nicola Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth-century Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 4-6.

Shakespeare the source, while winged diminutive beings are not found in folklore, neither English nor Celtic. The culmination of the popularity of the flower-fairy comes in the writings of J. M. Barrie. The character Peter Pan is introduced in the novel *The Little White Bird* (1902), in the guise of a one week old baby, flying with birds and fairies in Kensington Gardens. Peter is however said to be very old, having 'escaped from being human', while still being 'only half human' and 'Betwixt and Between', although the other half is not fairy but bird.³ The fairies are usually only seen by children, as they disguise themselves as flowers:

I have heard of children who declare that they have never seen a fairy. Very likely if they said this in the Kensington Gardens, they were standing looking at a fairy all the time. The reason they were cheated was that she pretended to be something else.⁴

The novelisation of Barrie's 1904 play about Peter Pan, called *Peter and Wendy*, emphasises the importance of children believing in fairies. When Tinker Bell drinks the poisoned medicine Captain Hook has left for Peter, she is saved by Peter appearing in the dreams of children, telling them to clap their hands and say that they believe in fairies.⁵ In *Peter and Wendy* Peter says that he escaped from his parents when he heard them talking about what he was to be when he would become a man. All his compatriots in Neverland are boys who have fled from the same threat, while all the fairies are female. Barrie had already emphasised the importance of being a boy in the novels *Sentimental Tommy* and the sequel *Tommy and Grizel*, published in 1896 and 1900, Peter Pan taking over the part of the eternal boy from the titular Tommy. Jack Zipes draws the conclusion that Barrie 'tried to objectify himself as the boy who wouldn't grow up':⁶ Standing at only five foot one or two and being pathologically shy, Barrie would be a suitable candidate for the chosen one to go to Faerie, following in the footsteps of the elfin poets Chaucer and Keats.⁷ *The Little White Bird* features a guest

³ J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*, ed. and notes Jack Zipes (New York: Penguin, 2004), pp. 166, 163, and 172.

⁴ Barrie, p. 185.

⁵ Barrie, p. 114.

⁶ Zipes in Barrie, pp. xiii and xiv.

⁷ Zipes in Barrie, p. xi.

appearance from Percy Bysshe Shelley, described as ‘a young gentleman and as grown-up as he need ever expect to be. He was a poet; and they are never exactly grown-up.’⁸ The fairies in the Peter Pan stories are boys’ fantasies, more specifically boys’ fantasies of girls: Tinker Bell is a girl, not a woman, fairy.⁹ Now bereft of the sexual connotations in the poems by Keats and Blake, flower-fairies became embodiments of the feminine ideal of the day and were meant to appeal to women, while Bown proposes that ‘while men were fascinated by fairies, women were largely indifferent to them’.¹⁰ Fairies became a gentlemanly interest, one more ‘light’ in nature than many other related spiritualist topics.

The primary promoter of flower-fairies in the early twentieth century was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In 1917, two cousins, Elsie Wright, then 16, and Frances Griffiths, ten, snapped five photographs of diminutive fairies. The matter was described in an article by Conan Doyle in *The Strand* magazine in 1920, causing a division between those people who believed that they were real, and those who were adamant that the photographs must have been forged. What is remarkable, however, is the reception: Doyle supported the girls’ claim, seconded by the psychic Edward L. Gardner, who claimed to have personally experienced fairies in Cottingley Glen. Elsie and Frances, however, were significantly less excited about the fairies than Doyle, Gardner, and the other men who championed their cause. In later interviews, the ladies have claimed variously that they were real or forged, or refused to say either: it was simply not that important to them if fairies were real or not. Following his article, Doyle was contacted by several people claiming that they had seen fairies of the same or similar appearance; some of these accounts appear in his book, *The Coming of the Fairies* (1924).¹¹ The objection to the fairies at this time was not that the diminutive, winged being

⁸ Barrie, p. 177.

⁹ Barrie, p. 23.

¹⁰ Bown, p. 3.

¹¹ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Coming of the Fairies* [1922] (London: Pavilion, 1997). See also Joe Cooper, *The Case of the Cottingley Fairies* (London: Robert Hale, 1990), for criticism.

sighted were fictional creations popularised by Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but that fairies were incommensurable with the rational belief of the day. The Cottingley fairies were simply sighted in the wrong century: by the 1920s, the flower-fairy had become outdated, and the world more disillusioned after the First World War, or as Diane Purkiss puts it, 'When the first shell was fired on the Western Front, the cute fairy was doomed.'¹² The magic and wonder of the childhood world that the diminutive fairy previously represented became lost in a whiff of nostalgic glamour, and a new elf was needed for a new age. This development to the full-size elf of modern fantasy can be tracked in the notebooks of J. R. R. Tolkien, who in his youth penned several poems about diminutive fairies, but after the war found that he preferred the human-sized elf of medieval literature.¹³ In Tolkien's later writing, the elf is a chivalric figure as well as magic, the fantasy of an older, fairer, wiser, and unaging race, perhaps without some of the weaknesses of the Middle-earthly Men, though with faults of their own. Tolkien's human-sized (or usually taller) Elves are, however, not entirely a recreation of the beings mentioned in Old Norse or Anglo-Saxon texts. Several other influences were closer to hand, among them the fairy tales of George MacDonald and Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, discussed below.

ii. George MacDonald

In *Phantastes*, MacDonald begins by addressing the issue of the size of fairies. The protagonist, Anodos, has inherited his father's estate, and when he opens his father's secretary to go through some papers, he finds in there a very small woman, who has this to say of her size:

Form is much, but size is nothing. It is a mere matter of relation. I suppose your six-foot lordship does not feel altogether insignificant, though to others you do look small

¹² Purkiss, p. 279.

¹³ For this development, see Dimitra Fimi, "'Come sing ye light fairy things tripping so gay': Victorian Fairies and the Early Work of J. R. R. Tolkien', *Working With English: Medieval and Modern Language, Literature and Drama* 2 (2005-2006), 10-26.

beside your old Uncle Ralph, who rises above you a great half-foot at least. But size is of such little consequence to me, that I may as well accommodate myself to your foolish prejudices.¹⁴

She then transforms into a gracious lady of human size, and reminds him that his little sister had read him a fairy tale the previous night:

‘When she had finished, she said, as she closed the book, ‘Is there a fairy-country, brother?’ You replied with a sigh, ‘I suppose there is, if one could find the way into it.’¹⁵

The lady then tells him that the following day he is to go on the road to Fairy Land.¹⁶ Upon waking up the next morning, he finds that his bedroom is in the process of transforming into a forest. The border between the worlds has been transgressed and Fairy Land is intruding into the mundane, an element frequently picked up in later narratives. Like in many other accounts, Anodos does not force his way into Fairy Land: he has no wish to go there, but is swept away by forces outside himself. Anodos’ journey through Fairy Land is a journey of self-discovery. *Phantastes*, being a ‘fairy tale for adults’, might have some of the same agenda as *The Faerie Queene*, as moral education for young men. Anodos is stalked throughout his journey by his own shadow, which he wants to get rid of, and encounters a knight, identified as Sir Galahad of the Arthur legend. Sir Galahad is Anodos’ otherworldly double in the tale:

Scarcely had the thought been born in my mind, when, approaching me from the left, through the trees, I espied a resplendent knight, of mighty size, whose armour seemed to shine of itself, without the sun. When he drew near, I was astonished to see that this armour was like my own; nay, I could trace, line by line, the correspondence of the inlaid silver to the device on my own. His horse, too, was like mine in colour, form, and motion; save that, like his rider, he was greater and fiercer than his counterpart.¹⁷

¹⁴ George MacDonald, *Phantastes and Lilith* [1858, 1895] (London: Victor Gollancz, 1962), p. 17.

¹⁵ MacDonald, *Phantastes*, p. 18.

¹⁶ MacDonald uses Fairy Land in *Phantastes*, and Fairyland in *The Golden Key*, while *Phantastes* is subtitled ‘A Faerie Romance’. Writers using different spellings and varieties for this kind of realm are examples of the personalisation of the Otherworld and its inhabitants, particularly important in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

¹⁷ MacDonald, *Phantastes*, p. 159.

The knight, whom Anodos feels to be the same as his shadow, leads him to a tower in the woods, where he is imprisoned for some time, alone with his shadow. He is released by the song of a beautiful woman, and finds himself having lost his own shadow, when he says, ‘I am what I am, nothing more....I have failed...I have lost myself – would it have been my shadow.’¹⁸ Anodos’s fairy double may be informed by Robert Kirk’s description of the co-walker, cited on page 42, above. While *Phantastes* does feature diminutive fairies – MacDonald’s Fairy Land is teeming with diminutive and decorative beings – the significant characters, the beautiful lady and the knight, are all in human guise. There is nothing in their physical appearance to imply that they are not humans, although what they do, and how they seem to constantly reappear, is magical. The exception is the lady’s daughter, who has wings made out of butterfly-and moth-wings. MacDonald’s Fairy Land is not the child-friendly fantasy realm filled with flower-fairies that it may appear: the emphasis is on the personal development of the humans who are chosen to enter it.

In MacDonald’s children’s story *The Golden Key*, the protagonists Tangle and Mossy begin as children, and then age at an alarming rate when entering Fairyland, to later grow younger, and fluctuate in age throughout.¹⁹ This is quite the opposite to many other accounts of Faerie where time stands still or moves more slowly. In the event of time passing more slowly, the humans entering it will not age until they return to the human world, as in the case of Oisín.²⁰ In *Phantastes*, the threat to the people of Fairy Land and Anodos in particular comes from its non-humanoid inhabitants, tree wights, shadows, and such things that are not properly *people*. The ruler of MacDonald’s Fairy Land is a wooden figure, who appears as

a block of wood roughly hewn into the mere outlines of a man; and hardly so, for it had but head, body, legs, and arms – the head was without a face, and the limbs utterly formless.²¹

¹⁸ MacDonald, *Phantastes*, pp. 164-65.

¹⁹ George MacDonald, *Fairy Tales*, ed. Greville MacDonald [1867] (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1922).

²⁰ Comyn, ‘The Lay of Oisín in the Land of Youth’, p. 77.

²¹ MacDonald, *Phantastes*, p. 171.

Anodos, his name meaning ‘pathless’ in Greek,²² is lost to the powers of Fairy Land: he has no control of his fate, and cannot even put what he sees in words:

I discovered a thing I could not account for. But it is no use trying to account for things in Fairy land; and one who travels there soon learns to forget the very idea of doing so, and takes everything as it comes; like a child, who, being in a chronic condition of wonder, is surprised at nothing.²³

Anodos’ adventure in Fairy Land is not only characteristic of other such outings in this realm before and after *Phantastes*, but is also found in literary texts and ‘real life’ accounts of aliens, ghosts, and other beings. What he does find in Fairy Land is written accounts of it, although the books themselves are as magical as the realm. The lady reads to him from an old volume of fairy tales, many of them about King Arthur and his knights, which may be what makes Sir Galahad come alive.²⁴ Anodos is further immersed in literature when he finds himself alone in a grand palace. Upon reading the books in the library, he finds that he is the protagonist of every tale, experiencing everything written on the page.²⁵ MacDonald’s Fairy Land is the realm of the fictional, of belief and make-believe, and this is a serious matter and not one reserved only for children. Anodos, the pathless one, is lost in the fictional realm that is Fairy Land, and his visit is for his own development alone. He enters Fairy Land, then the library, then the books but what he finds himself in is a continuum of people who have entered the realm for the same reason and is thus part of the history of the place: he is in the ‘ample volume’ described by Spenser.²⁶

iii. Rudyard Kipling

The idea of living history is further explored by Rudyard Kipling in *Puck of Pook’s Hill*.

Kipling’s Puck is not a direct transportation of the Shakespearian character, but draws also on

²² Colin N. Manlove, *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 75.

²³ MacDonald, *Phantastes*, p. 33.

²⁴ MacDonald, *Phantastes*, pp. 24-25.

²⁵ MacDonald, *Phantastes*, p. 81.

²⁶ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, II.x.70-76.

folkloristic accounts of the puck. Puck is the last fairy in Britain, an ancient witness to history, and his role in the tale is to narrate episodes from British history to the children Dan and Una, or let figures out of that history narrate their own tales.²⁷ Kipling's Puck is a dwarvish, but not diminutive being, 'a small, brown, broad-shouldered, pointy-eared person with a snub nose, slanting blue eyes, and a grin that ran right across his freckled face.'²⁸ With the addition of H.R. Millar's illustrations, Puck comes across as looking clearly non-European. *Puck of Pook's Hill* has as complicated a view of race and nationality as Kipling's other works: he avoids using the foreign-sounding *sidhe*, and re-names subterranean peoples of the British Isles as 'The People of the Hills'. The character Puck also objects to the word fairy, mainly because of the popular perception in this time and place of fairies as winged and diminutive. The book from the start takes a stance against this view:

Can you wonder that the People of the Hills don't care to be confused with that painty-winged, wand-waving, sugar-and-shake-your-head set of impostors? Butterfly wings indeed! I've seen Sir Huon and a troop of his people setting off from Tintagel Castle for Hy-Brasil in the teeth of a sou'-westerly gale, with the spray flying all over the Castle, and the Horses of the Hills wild with fright[.]²⁹

Daintiness can be projected onto fairies in earlier texts if one wants, but one would have to read them very poorly to point to a literary history of flower-fairies. Kipling does, however, know his elvish literary history, as *Puck of Pook's Hill* and its successor *Rewards and Fairies* make references to many of the texts previously discussed in this thesis. The world within the books acknowledges other supernatural beings apart from fairies, but none are left in Britain:

The people of the hills have all left. I saw them come into Old England and I saw them go. Giants, trolls, kelpies, brownies, goblins, imps; wood, tree, mound, and water spirits; heath-people, hill-watchers, treasure-guards, good people, little people, pishogues, leprechauns, night-riders, pixies, nixies, gnomes, and the rest – gone, all

²⁷ The idea of elves as witnesses to history is further explored by Tolkien, for example in that Elrond can account for the history of the One Ring. Tolkien, *Fellowship*, pp. 317-321.

²⁸ Rudyard Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill* [1906] (London: MacMillan, 1951), p. 6.

²⁹ Kipling, *Puck*, p. 14.

gone! I came to England with Oak, Ash, and Thorn, and when Oak, Ash, and Thorn are gone I shall go too.³⁰

Puck explains this exodus as being caused by the Reformation:

Of theirs which yet remain,
Were footed in Queen Mary's days
On many a grassy plain,
But since of late Elizabeth,
And, later, James came in,
Are never seen on any heath
As when the time hath been.³¹

Kipling adheres to the chronology of elvish literary history, and introduces Weland, the first named literary elf, in the first chapter. Weland is however not described as an elf, but rather as a god, or at least he has claims to be one. He appears in the shape of an image of himself brought to England by 'pirates':

a big, black wooden thing with amber beads around his neck. [...] When he saw me he began a long chant in his own tongue, telling me how he was going to rule England, and how I should smell the smoke of his altars from Lincolnshire to the Isle of Wight.³²

Weland indeed becomes worshipped across the land, as he predicted. He does, however, depart from Britain when his priests stop giving human and animal sacrifices, only to reappear as an old, and quite human-looking, smith. Weland returns to his former glory once

³⁰ Kipling, *Puck*, p. 10. Oak, ash and thorn were particularly sacred to the Celtic druids, representing past, present and future. Puck's statement would then mean that he would go when time ended, that is, never, and would also point to a Celtic origin of fairies, see also MacKillop *sub* 'Fairy tree'.

The triad of trees is also quoted in an elvish song in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*:

*Sing no more Pine, till the wind of the morn!
Fall Moon! Dark be the land!
Hush! Hush! Oak, Ash, and Thorn!
Hushed be the water, till dawn is at hand!*

Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 274. Magic or sentient trees are important elements in Tolkien's writing, see for example the Ents and Huorns in *The Two Towers*, p. 71ff. and p. 204ff., and Old Man Willow in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, pp. 156-59. For the beings mentioned, see Briggs, *Dictionary of Fairies*.

³¹ Kipling, *Puck*, p. 10. The rhyme is based on a section of 'A Proper New Ballad, intituled The Fairies Farewell; or, God-a-Mercy Will' by Richard Corbet, from 1647:

But since of late, *Elizabeth*,
And later *James* came in,
They never daunc'd on any heath
As when the time hath bin.

The poem also coined the phrase 'Farewell rewards and Fairies'. H. J. C. Grierson and G. Bulloch, eds, *The Oxford Book of Seventeenth Century Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), pp. 206-8.

³² Kipling, *Puck*, p. 17.

a farmer thanks him for shoeing his horse, and then makes a sword, which is given to a Saxon novice, Brother Hugh. Other than Puck, who is a fairy, and Weland, who is not an elf, no other named fairies or elves appear. Despite Puck's preamble of fairies not being small and winged, precisely these beings appear in chapter nine, where the character Tom Shoesmith repeats the Reformation as the reason for the 'Pharisees' departure from Britain:

This Reformatories tarrified the Pharisees same as the reaper goin' round a last stand o' wheat terrifies rabbits. They packed into the Marsh from all parts, and they says, "Fair or foul, we must flit out o' this, for Merry England's done with, an' we're reckoned among the Images."³³

In Tom's narrative, the 'Pharisees' wanted a boat to sail to the still Catholic France, because 'Their liddle wings could no more cross Channel than so many tired butterflies',³⁴ that is, they were too small to be able to fly across the English Channel.³⁵

iv. The King of Elfland's Daughter and its sources

Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, published in 1924, can be seen as the return of the human-sized elf to literature. As the text pre-dates Tolkien and seems to have had a significant effect on the literary elf, I will discuss it in some detail. First, I will account for the legend upon which the text is based, giving the history of the story at this point, as it has a lineage quite distinct from that of the Faerie King, for example. The genesis seems to have been a ballad popular in Sweden and Denmark in the late medieval period. The Swedish version is called *Herr Olof och Älvorna*, 'Master Olof and the Elves'. Herr Olof rides on a mountain and comes across a dance of elves. The Elfking's daughter asks him to dance with her but he refuses, as he is to be married the following day. She then curses him, and on his way home, hits himself on an oak branch and later dies. The Danish version of *Herr Olof* is

³³ Kipling, *Puck*, p. 267.

³⁴ Kipling, *Puck*, p. 268.

³⁵ The word 'Pharisees' is not an invention of Kipling's: Keightley accounts of 'farisees' as a local expression in Suffolk, while there were and are many other varieties and euphemisms. Puck's dislike for the word 'fairies' might point to a rejection of a standardised word for a multiple characters. Keightley, p. 306.

called *Elverskud*.³⁶ Here, the maiden offers not only to dance with Oluf, but also promises him a horse, a mail shirt, a sword, and plenty of gold, whereas the Swedish maiden promises nothing of the sort. Again, Oluf refuses as he is engaged, and upon telling the maiden this, she slaps him on the cheek and draws blood. The ballad then recounts Oluf's return to his family home, death, and the grief of his would-be bride, ending in her death from a broken heart. 'Elverskud' means disease caused by the elves, yet the ballad makes no further references to elves.³⁷ In fact, the maiden is said to come out of a 'Dans med Dværge', a dance of dwarves. This may be included in order to facilitate the rhyme with 'Bjerger', mountain, in this particular rendition, and should be taken to mean that the maiden is a supernatural being, or a being of magical powers, rather than one of stunted growth. She is addressed only as a 'Jomfru', maiden, and makes no claim of being the Elfking's daughter or any other dignity. The inclusion of a curse, the slap that makes Oluf die within a day, would explain why the Swedish Olof does not drop dead immediately upon hitting himself on an oak branch. The ballad does not specify what kind of injury to what part of the body that is acquired, but the phrasing 'Min fähle war snabb och Jagh war seen' ('my horse was quick and I was slow') may indicate that Olof was struck off his horse by the branch.³⁸ A second Danish version is known as *Elverhøy*, which is recounted in the first person by an unnamed young swain, which is how I will refer to him henceforth.³⁹ He is asleep when the elves appear, having lain down on an elvish mound (*Elverhøy*). This time two maidens approach him, the first being the main agent, while the other is employed only to do the cheek-slapping and sing a song. Her voice seems to have magical properties as it makes the water halt in a

³⁶ 'Elverskud', accessed from the Kalliope archive of old Danish poetry, <<http://www.kalliope.org>>, 26 May 2008.

³⁷ A. F. Dahlin, *Dansk-Norsk och Svensk Ordbok* (Stockholm: J. Beckmans Förlag, 1895) *sub* 'Elleskudt'.

³⁸ Reproduced in Schön, *Älvor, Vättar och Andra Väsen*, p. 64. For English translations, see Keightley, pp. 82-87.

³⁹ 'Elverhøy', accessed from the Kalliope archive of old Danish poetry, <<http://www.kalliope.org>>, 26 May 2008.

stream, but does not stop time since the birds are still singing. The main maiden says that she wants him to live with the elvish maidens in the mound (no males are mentioned), where they will teach him to read, write, and cast runes.⁴⁰ The young swain is, however, fortunate enough to carry a sword, so that the elves cannot touch him, being averse to iron, while the Swedish Olof and the Danish Oluf seems to be riding unarmed.⁴¹ This might be explained by the fact that Olof/Oluf is riding home to his wedding, while the young swain is on his way to court. In this way, *Elverhøy* makes more sense as a cautionary tale, as the young swain warns of both falling asleep on an elvish mound and going without a sword.

The first literary account of the tale is Goethe's *Erlkönig*, which derives its name from Herder's translation of a version of *Elverskud*, here called *Herr Oluf reitet spät und weit (Erlkönigs Tochter)*, published in 1778.⁴² Goethe picks up the character absent from the ballads, namely the king of the elves himself. In the ballad, the maiden may or may not be an elf, and may or may not be the Elfking's daughter, but the Elfking himself does not appear in any version of it. One other possible influence on Goethe's *Erlkönig* is the legend of the Elfking of Stevns on the Danish island of Sjælland. The king is sometimes said to live in a mound known as Elverhøy, identified as the one featured in the ballad of that name, and sometimes in a chalk rock called Stevns Klint. The Elfking of Stevns follows much the same pattern as other Elf-or Faerie kings, lords of the Otherworld and leaders of the Wild Hunt: the king is indeed a huntsman who blows his magical horn, guarding his realm against intruders. He is sometimes identified as the Devil, and can appear in the form of a black crow.⁴³

⁴⁰ A form of divination. See *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, below.

⁴¹ The aversion to iron is not explained in the ballad but can reasonably be concluded as this feature was popularised at this time. Alternatively, the carrying of the sword can signify that the young swain can be subject to death by the sword or the knife, as the maiden says, since he carries weapons, while the cheek-slap is supposed to make him invulnerable in this version, rather than cursing him. There might be a taboo on carrying weapons into the mound, although this contradicts *Elverskud*, above.

⁴² This English translation by Matthew Lewis used here was made from Herder's and published in Walter Scott, *An Apology for Tales of Terror* (Kelso: printed at the Mail office, 1799).

⁴³ Evald Tang Christensen, 'Ellekongen', in *Danske Sagn Som De Har Lydt I Folkemunde*, 2 vols (Copenhagen, 1928), II: 10, accessed from <<http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Ellekongen>>, 24 June 2010.

Goethe's ballad narrates the tale of a father riding through the night with his sick son in his arms. The boy is harassed by the Erlkönig, who rides next to them and whispers in his ear, but the father sees only a trail of mist and hears the wind howling.⁴⁴ The king is beckoning to the boy to come with him and be raised in his kingdom, and tended to by his daughter and mother.⁴⁵ When the king finally grasps the boy, he dies. Goethe's Erlkönig, who is customarily portrayed in art as white and semi-transparent, and the Elfking of Stevens can then be seen as White Lord characters, spectral huntsmen and omens of death, thereby related to Gwyn ap Nudd in the Welsh tradition. As it is unlikely that Wales had a considerable amount of cultural exchange with Scandinavia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it is reasonable to conclude that versions of the White Lord and Lady were spread throughout Europe. While the Scandinavian Elfking has been preserved as an elf, and Gwyn ap Nudd has later been interpreted as a fairy by the English, the *Wisse Weiven* of Germany are not considered as elves by Jacob Grimm. There might have been a widely spread interpretation of spectral apparitions as elves at one point, while this phenomenon might have been adapted to local customs and changed over time to be perceived as ghosts, angels, demons, aliens, or other beings.

The King of Elfland's Daughter locates the setting to England, but an alternative and magical version of it, yet retaining references to the 'real' world. Lord Dunsany perceives Elfland to be specifically the Otherworld to England and located adjacent to it, as he explains in the preface:

I hope that no suggestion of any strange land that may be conveyed by the title will scare readers away from this book; for, though some chapters do indeed tell of Elfland, in the greater part of them there is no more to be shown than the face of the

⁴⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Selected Verse*, ed. and trans. David Luke (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p 81.

⁴⁵ The mention of the Erlkönig's mother is only made in the ballad translated by Herder. *Herr Oluf reitet spät und weit (Erlkönigs Tochter)* is then a translation of a third, lesser known version of the ballad.

field we know, and ordinary English woods and a common village and valley, a good twenty or twenty-five miles from the border of Elfland.⁴⁶

Lord Dunsany names this human realm Erl, as an appropriation of Goethe's expression. The people of Erl long to be ruled by a magic lord. For this reason, the son of the current ruler is sent to Elfland to marry the Elfking's daughter, in order to produce a magical heir to the throne of Erl. The son, named Alveric, complies and returns with the Elfking's daughter, Lirazel. An heir is produced, a boy called Orion, but Lirazel longs for Elfland and is whisked away there by her father, who is not given a personal name. Alveric then spends years searching in vain for her, because the king of Elfland has withdrawn the land from access from the human world. Alveric's search is uneventful but pivotal: the fruitless search for the Otherworld is yet another important theme in the literary history of elves. As mentioned before, entry to the realm of elves or fairies cannot be forced, which is exactly what Alveric is trying to do. He is armed with a sword made of iron from a comet, although the resistance of Elfland may be rather in the significance of the sword as a weapon of force rather than of iron, as Alveric's son, Orion, has no problem hunting with a sword. Dunsany's Elfland, then, is the perilous realm that is sometimes called Faerie, which Alveric cannot access by will or necessity. The domain is instead completely subject to the king's authority to the extent that the king himself can be seen as a personification of the realm. Firstly, time does not exist in Elfland, explaining the eternal youth of the elves. This concept is transmitted to later fantasy and adapted, for example, by Tolkien to Aman, the undying land of the Valar of Middle-earth. Secondly, the whole existence of Elfland is shaped by the king's emotions. He commands it by his physical presence, by chanting, speaking spells, or waving his arms. His ultimate power is contained in three runes, being remains of his Scandinavian origin. The Elf

⁴⁵ Lord Dunsany, *The King of Elfland's Daughter* [1924] (New York: Del Rey, 1999), p. viii.

King is also called the ‘enchanted King’ and the ‘wizard King’;⁴⁷ the elves are magic rather than another ethnicity than humans, indicating that Lord Dunsany had knowledge of the literary history of elves other than the particular folklore of the Scandinavian Elfkings. He refers to the people of the Otherworld as fairies in the first chapter, later settling on elves. Properties of elves and Elfland are usually elfin, despite the text clearly being set in a time before the word had come into use via Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*. Dunsany’s knights are, however, elvish, not elfin, while other things are, like the Elfin Mountains. The preference for ‘elf’ rather than ‘fairy’ is probably because of the lineage that the story draws on, described above. Yet like many accounts of the realm of Faerie, Elfland, too, is the perilous realm of magic that cannot be controlled by humans. Neil Gaiman, in his preface, points out the eeriness of a world without time, where even *a priori* concepts are unsettled, and identifies *The King of Elfland’s Daughter* as ‘real’ fantasy: ‘It is a true story, as these things go, in every way that matters.’⁴⁸ The text contains one reference to a real event: the mounting of a unicorn horn, in the world of the novel the horn of a unicorn killed by Orion. The date is given as 1530, when the horn had reached Pope Clement in Rome, who wished to present it to King Francis I of France. The multi-artist Benvenuto Cellini did indeed lose out on the commission to mount a unicorn horn to a goldsmith from Milan called Tobbia. The horn is described by Cellini in his memoirs as that of a unicorn, with no comment on it being a supernatural creature.⁴⁹ The unicorn is what draws Orion closer to the border of Elfland, which is described as twilight:

And now he thought no more of earthly things, but only gazed into that wall of twilight, as prophets tampering with forbidden lore gaze into cloudy crystals. And to all that was elvish in Orion’s blood, to all that he had of magic from his mother, the little lights of the twilight-built boundary lured and tempted and beckoned.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Dunsany, pp. 173 and 174.

⁴⁸ Neil Gaiman in Dunsany, p. xiii.

⁴⁹ Dunsany, pp. 133-134. Benvenuto Cellini, *Life of Benvenuto Cellini*, trans. Anne MacDonnell [1728] (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2003), p. 92.

⁵⁰ Dunsany, p. 142.

The motivation behind the joining of Alveric and Lirazel is to create a magical heir to rule Erl, which is realised by Orion. Orion is quarter elf, as Lirazel's mother was human, but aged and died in Elfland, despite time standing still there.⁵¹ Anodos in *Phantastes* has fairy blood in him, which may be why he is drawn into Fairy Land, without his conscious will:⁵² the emphasis is then on blood, not identity.

v. *The Broken Sword*

The opposite situation is explored in Poul Anderson's *The Broken Sword*, which features the human-sized elves of modern fantasy but is written before the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*. Anderson draws upon many of the same sources of the elf-character as Tolkien does from Northern mythology, while also incorporating Celtic source material and features of earlier fantasy, like *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. The plot is that of a changeling, where a human boy is abducted by the elf lord Imric and replaced by the offspring of the same and a troll woman called Gora. The boy, called Skafloc, is raised by Imric and his sister Leea in the realm of Elfheugh, the British realm of elves, while the changeling Valgard is raised by humans. Throughout the book, Skafloc's identity as an elf in all but blood is emphasised. While the elves are in general benevolent and noble, Valgard is described as brutish and consciously vicious. *The Broken Sword* makes reference to many other cultures and tribes, pointing to a time of around the tenth century, because of the references to Danelaw, and importantly, the text is tying together traditions of elves and similar beings in different cultures. The names Imric and Skafloc are meant to sound Anglo-Saxon, while Valgard is raised in a Danish family. There are also guest appearances by the Irish Tuatha de Danann, who, in contrast to the people of Elfheugh, can tolerate iron, with the sea god Manannan Mac Lir being of particular help to Skafloc. Several figures from Northern mythology, among

⁵¹ Dunsany, p. 173.

⁵² MacDonald, *Phantastes*, p. 22.

them the Æsir, also have important roles.⁵³ There is a council of elves concerning their war with the trolls, where various tribes appear, including those from Pictland, described as ‘Shorter and heavier than true elves [...] dark of skin and with long black locks and beards blowing wild about their tattooed faces’.⁵⁴ Anderson’s Scottish elves compare well with the description given by Hugh Miller in *The Old Red Sandstone* (1841), who were

stunted, misgrown, ugly creatures, attired in antique jerkins of plaid, long grey clokes, and little red caps, from under which their wild uncombed locks shot out over their cheeks and foreheads.⁵⁵

Imric’s people of Elfheugh are, however, considered as ‘true elves’, the most noble tribe of all. Anderson offers detailed descriptions of their appearance and manner, in this case of Imric, which resonates with both Tolkien’s perception of elves, and that of later fantasy:

He looked at her with the strange slant eyes of the elf-folk, all cloudy-blue without pupil or white. There were little moon-flecks drifting in Imric’s eyes, and shadows of ancient wisdom, for Imric had dwelt long in the land when the first men came. But he was ever youthful, with the broad forehead and high cheekbones, the narrow jaw and the straight thin-chiseled nose of the elf lords. His hair floated silvery-gold, finer than spider silk, from under his horned helmet down to his wide red-caped shoulders.⁵⁶

Imric is, however, only earl of the British elves: the high king of the elves is in fact the Erlking. In Anderson’s rendition, he is still white, though from age rather than mist. The Erlking is the ruler of Alfheim, this being not one place but a communal name for the elvish realm of various countries, while the location of the Erlking’s realm is not described in any more detail than that it is reached by ship from Britain.⁵⁷ Anderson sometimes uses the expression ‘folk of faerie’, without the capital F, to describe any supernatural being, including elves, indicating ‘faerie’ not as a person or being, but a feature of one.⁵⁸ The elves

⁵³ In this respect the heir to *The Broken Sword* can be said to be Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods*.

⁵⁴ Poul Anderson, *The Broken Sword* [1954] (London: Gollancz, 2002), p. 113.

⁵⁵ Reproduced in Keightley, pp. 356-357. The beings described by Miller and encountered in the Scottish lowlands call themselves ‘the People of Peace’, which Evans-Wentz points out can be a mistranslation of *síd*, mound, as *síd*, peace. Evans-Wentz, p. 438n.

⁵⁶ Anderson, p. 7.

⁵⁷ Anderson, p. 26.

⁵⁸ Anderson, p. 10.

are, however, the rulers of the supernatural or magical world, appearing particularly magical to humans, in this case the girls Asgerd and Freda:

Strange were these tall warriors, moving like rippling water with never a sound of footfall, but byrnies chiming silvery through the night. White and ageless, of thin-carved, high-boned features, with beast ears and eyes of blind mystery, they were a sight of terror to the mortal gaze.⁵⁹

Anderson's elves have byrnies and weapons of alloys that shine like silver, while Lord Dunsany's knights of Elfland have armour 'which seemed to be brighter than any metal of ours'.⁶⁰ Sir Galahad in *Phantastes* has armour that shines by itself,⁶¹ while Anodos notes that in the empty palace where he is staying, 'silver seemed everywhere preferred to gold'.⁶² MacDonald's fairies are described as generally nocturnal, since when Anodos enters Fairy Land, he finds no-one:

Then I remembered that the night is the fairies' day, and the moon their sun; and I thought – Everything sleeps and dreams now: when the day comes, it will be different. At the same time I, being a man and a child of the day, I felt some anxiety as to how I should fare among the elves and other children of the night who wake when mortals dream, and find their common life in those wondrous hours that flow noiselessly over the moveless death-like forms of men and women and children[.]⁶³

Dunsany's Elfland seems to be in a permanent state of twilight, its colourings being blue, white and silver, while Anderson's elves cannot stand sunlight at all.⁶⁴ This is then one of Skafloc's great strengths: he can venture outside during the day. Skafloc can also touch iron, whereas none of the other elves can, facilitating the main plot of the broken sword of Freyr, given to Skafloc at his naming ceremony. Skafloc, then, identifies himself as an elf, but has strengths they have not. This is in contrast to the changeling boy fostered by Sir Huon of Bordeaux in Kipling's *Rewards and Fairies*, who cannot tolerate iron by mere association

⁵⁹ Anderson, p. 82.

⁶⁰ Dunsany, p. 22-23.

⁶¹ MacDonald, *Phantastes*, p. 159.

⁶² MacDonald, *Phantastes*, p. 78.

⁶³ MacDonald, *Phantastes*, pp. 21-22. This rule apparently exempts the lady he encounters, possibly explained by her being of mixed race, while Sir Galahad is encountered on the third day of Anodos' journey, though Sir Galahad's armour shines 'without the sun' (pp. 22-23, pp. 158-59).

⁶⁴ Anderson, pp. 20-21.

with fairies; neither can Huon himself, despite being human in origin in the French text.⁶⁵

The aversion to iron is variously employed in later fiction: Tolkien opted for non-aversion due to the necessity of elven smiths, for example Mahtan, Fëanor and Celebrimbor, for plot development. Much of the imagery present in the texts discussed above – *Phantastes*, *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, and *The Broken Sword* – does resonate with Tolkien's Eldar, a people of the stars and twilight. I would therefore suggest that elves and fairies, perceived as fictional characters with a visible literary lineage, parts of which are described in this thesis, are *obscurus*, to use Grimm's term, as a general characteristic. The literary elf evades definition and, in many cases, clears descriptions. Their reality is instead in the interpretation of the reader, making elves properly literary characters, in the sense of being real in the literary world, with no claim to being real or in the world outside. The elf is then also properly a character of fantasy literature, incommensurable with any claim of realism as a genre of fiction, even perhaps being the character that most of all signifies the genre of fantasy.

⁶⁵ Rudyard Kipling, *Rewards and Fairies* (London: MacMillan, 1960), pp. 3-24.

Section II

Tolkien's Eldar: the Elf Re-historicised

Chapter 6: An 'Elvish-looking folk'

i. The implied reader and its expectations

When considering the ways in which Tolkien's Eldar are presented to the reader it is important to take into account who the implied audience of the texts is and the history of their production and publication. In his lifetime, Tolkien published two books featuring Elves and one incorporating the somewhat different Fairies.¹ *The Hobbit* (1937) was begun with the intention of being read to Tolkien's own children and would be written with their knowledge of Elves in mind. His magnum opus *The Lord of the Rings*, published in three volumes in 1954 and 1955, was intended to be a follow-up to *The Hobbit* and therefore directed to children, but during its production changed into something else entirely. In its completed form, it is clear that *The Lord of the Rings* has no intended reader, save perhaps Tolkien himself, and that the narrative takes for granted certain knowledge of Elves. The text omits what might be considered as essential information such as if Elves have pointed ears, and many other physical issues like explaining their longevity. However, Tolkien himself considered *The Lord of the Rings* to be minor to his intended magnum opus, the mythology of Middle-earth, which exists in a vast number of versions with the most complete published posthumously in 1977 as *The Silmarillion*. Tolkien's writing has re-established the elf character as a human-sized being, and therefore a Significant Other, in popular culture. However, as Tolkien produced the texts at very different points in his life, the way the Elf is represented in these texts is not coherent. If one were to imagine the continuum of the Eldar from their creation by the Valar, the 'gods' or supreme powers of the realm of Arda, of which Middle-earth forms a part, to their first appearance in a printed text in *The Hobbit*, a somewhat clearer picture emerges. In the same manner that elves in the mundane world and

¹ Elf and Elves will be spelled with capital E's, following Tolkien's usual practice. The word Eldar will also be used when it is necessary to differentiate between Tolkien's Elves and others. Elven or Elvish will be used to describe properties of Elves, also in keeping Tolkien's vocabulary.

in our own time exist as fragments of lost greatness, so too do the Silvan Elves of *The Hobbit* appear as remnants of their more noble forbears. By the time of the events described in *The Lord of the Rings*, the Elves are in the process of vacating Middle-earth to return to Aman, the part of Arda where the Valar still live, a deathless place not unlike Faerie in some narratives.

ii. *The Eldar*

Tolkien's Eldar were the first human-sized literary elves to gain wide-spread popularity for some time. As discussed in the previous chapter, human-sized elves and fairies had had a literary presence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but these texts by no means reached the audiences of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Diminutive fairies were the norm by the time of the publication of *The Hobbit*, yet it is clear that Tolkien presumed that the audience would immediately imagine the Elves as human-sized. He uses the word Elf rather than fairy, the well-established word in English for a supernatural being, not because he considers Elves to be bigger than fairies but because he wants to allude to an earlier meaning of the word: this meaning has already been outlined in this thesis, but is likely to have been rather obscure to Tolkien's original audience. Tolkien (re)creates in fiction what he perceives that the Norse and Anglo-Saxon elves might have been seen as, while at the same time incorporating features of the fairies of French Arthurian Romance and later fairy tales. While the medieval people of the fairy sometimes dance and sing in nature, they are certainly more of magical humans than nature spirits. Forest-dwelling human-sized beings are rather the nymphs, dryads, fauns and satyrs of the classical world than the elves and fairies of northern Europe. Terry Gunnell says

We must remember that the Scandinavian elves, when we later hear of their habitats, live in rocks or the earth. They do not inhabit forests or live in trees. Nor – for 99% of the time – are they warriors.²

² Terry Gunnell, 'Tívar in a Timeless Land: Tolkien's Elves', Symposium, The Sigurður Nordal Institute, University of Iceland, 13-14 September 2002. Accessed from <<http://www.nordals.hi.is/Apps/WebObjects/>

There are certainly fairy knights – the host that abducts Heurodis in *Sir Orfeo* come to mind – as well as hosts of the Sidhe and the people of Annwn in Irish and Welsh texts. However, it is questionable how ‘elvish’ these peoples were in relation to the Eldar. Tolkien makes ample references to Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon elves, but how influential this material was is hard to tell because Tolkien never commented on Álfar or ælfe in particular, so all we know about his opinion on them is what comes through in his fictional texts.³ As a philologist he might have been encouraged to think of elves as nature-spirits by some Old English words. The tenth century Cleopatra Glossary translates the Latin *castalidas nymphe* into *dūn-ælf* (‘mountain elves’) and *ruricolae musae* as *land-ælf* (‘land-elves’; the Latin means rather ‘country-dwelling muses’).⁴ These are translations and do not refer to local beings, and do not either mean forest-dweller. One sort of being that is evidently imported from the Classical world and made native is the Puck. The Old English *pūcel* can be translated as goblin or demon, while similar words in the other Germanic languages usually mean devil.⁵ This, along with the similarity of the Puck to popular images of the Devil, would certainly have dissuaded Tolkien from using such a being. The adaptation of Elves as nature-spirits is best demonstrated by the Elvenking who appears in *The Hobbit*, and who is immediately identified as a king of the forest while simultaneously having features of a Germanic-style warrior. This combination of nature spirit and warrior is not found before Tolkien but has now become the norm of how elves are portrayed in modern Fantasy.

As discussed in chapter 1, there is a good deal of support for the belief that the Norse and Anglo-Saxon elves were perceived to be human-sized, but there is also very little known about them. From the Norse sources Tolkien seems to have taken note of the division of the

HI.woa/wa/dp?detail=1004509&name=nordals_en_greinar_og_erindi>, 9 December 2006.

³ ‘On Fairy-stories’ and the essay accompanying his children’s book *Smith of Wootton Major* treat fairies.

⁴ Hall, p. 82.

⁵ Bosworth and Toller *sub* ‘pūcel’.

Álfar or at least made use of the idea of a ranking system for his Eldar. Three tribes were created that later split and were otherwise divided, as will be further outlined in chapter 9.⁶

The Vanyar, also called Fair Elves, are the highest ranking and would roughly correspond to the Norse liosálfar. These left for Aman immediately after being called, which proves their fidelity to the Valar and might entitle them to be called semi-angelic. The Noldor or Deep Elves are the middle grade. They are wrights associated with earth and possibly the tribe that most appropriately can be called Elves of Twilight. The lowest ranking tribe are the Teleri or Sea Elves. This is the most scattered tribe which in the Third Age, when *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are set, no longer predominantly lives by the sea. The Silvan Elves of Mirkwood are the lowest sub-tribe of the Teleri. These divisions allowed Tolkien to describe a variety of characteristics among the Eldar, but this only comes through in the mythology. The lack of introduction to the Elves of *The Lord of the Rings* makes it hard for the reader to recognise these differences and know what to expect from members of each tribe. However, it is likely that Tolkien purposely played down the Elvish elements in *The Lord of the Rings* and instead focussed on the mortal characters and in particular how they deal with the weaknesses that come from that state and work together to create a new future without Elvish influence. The whole history of the Elves has already played out in Tolkien's mind, yet he never fully explains this to the reader. Instead, the reader is placed in the role of a scholar who is to reach such conclusions her/himself from the fragments that remain in the present day of Middle-earth. The lack of background information about the Elves entails that the reader might get a different impression than what Tolkien had imagined, which also gives readers the freedom to interpret his empirical style of narrative in a wider variety of ways.

iii. Elven men

⁶ The word tribe rather than race will be utilised when discussing the divisions of the Elves, and the names of the tribes with capital letter, i.e. Sindar, Nandor, and so on. This departs from Tolkien's vocabulary but is necessary to differentiate between the races Men, Dwarves and Elves, and subdivisions thereof.

Tolkien's descriptions of the Eldar also in many cases lack detail. They often do not describe individual features, which means that the Eldar can be simplified to 'tall, fair and noble', words found in most descriptions. Furthermore, the first description of Elves in Tolkien's published works, of the Silvan Elves of Mirkwood in *The Hobbit*, states that they were an 'elvish-looking folk', which presumes that the reader knows what a folk that looks elvish would look like.⁷ The Silvan Elves are then not entirely presented as Elves, in Tolkien's later meaning, but as something like them. However, once their prince Legolas joins the Fellowship in *The Lord of the Rings* he is clearly identified as an Elf:

There was also a strange Elf clad in green and brown, Legolas, a messenger from his father, Thranduil, the King of the Elves of Northern Mirkwood.⁸

How is Legolas 'strange' to Frodo? Is he different from the Elves Frodo has met so far? The Hobbits' first encounter with Elves occurs already on the outskirts of their homeland of the Shire. These are the highest ranking sort, High Elves, as opposed to the Silvan Elves, and are clearly set out as worthy of reverence by the Hobbits: they announce themselves by means of song that seems to banish the Black Rider that hunts them, and once they appear, seem to shine by themselves. However, this is all that is offered in terms of description: the reader is never informed of height, hair colour, facial features, potentially pointed ears, or anything else that might seem in place for the first appearance of a before unmentioned people. Their leader, Gildor Inglorion, the first individual Elf who has a speaking part in *The Lord of the Rings*, is not described at all.

The lack of introduction of the Elves in *The Lord of the Rings* is notable. There is no background information provided to the reader as there has been in the case of Hobbits. It can be assumed that the text preceding the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings* entitled 'Concerning Hobbits' was inserted in order to explain what a Hobbit is, since Hobbits were

⁷ Tolkien, *Hobbit*, p. 142.

⁸ Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 314.

an original creation of Tolkien, and Elves were not. While the Eldar have some features of earlier elves, they also display many new or originally combined features. Tolkien gathers features from a wide variety of sources, and, although this type of elf has been described in fiction before, it was not yet the generally accepted image at the time when Tolkien was writing. Earlier writers have usually conformed to the type of elf or fairy found in a particular culture, but Tolkien did not. While the Eldar are clearly the fantasy of a radiant but long-lost Germanic type of elf, those that appear in his early writing dance, sing and frolic in forests more like diminutive fairies or even wood-nymphs. As Fimi observes, Tolkien did not originally intend to include *The Hobbit* in his mythology, and so purposely wrote the *Hobbit*-elves⁹ into different beings than his mythological Elves – he for example did not intend the Elrond that appears in *The Hobbit* to be the same person as the one who appears in the mythology.¹⁰

The Hobbit does contain a brief history of the Elves, but it is clear that these are not yet the Eldar of *The Lord of the Rings*:

The feasting people were Wood-elves, of course. These are not wicked folk. If they have a fault it is distrust of strangers. Though their magic was strong, even in those days they were wary. They differed from the High Elves of the West, and were more dangerous and less wise. For most of them (together with their scattered relations in the hills and mountains) were descendent from the ancient tribes that never went to Faerie in the West. There the Light-elves and the Deep-elves and the Sea-elves went and lived for ages, and grew fairer and wiser and more learned, and invented their magic and their cunning craft in the making of beautiful and marvellous things, before some came back into the Wide World. In the Wide World the Wood-elves lingered in the twilight of our Sun and Moon, but loved best the stars; and they wandered in the great forests that grew tall in lands that are now lost. They dwelt most often by the edges of the woods, from which they could escape at times to hunt, or to ride and run over the open lands by moonlight or starlight; and after the coming of Men they took even more to the gloaming and the dusk. Still elves they were and remain, and that is Good People.¹¹

The names of the tribes are not yet in Elvish and therefore require some explanation. The

⁹ The word is sometimes capitalised in this text, at other times not.

¹⁰ Dimitra Fimi, *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History: From Fairies to Hobbits* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 25.

¹¹ Tolkien, *Hobbit*, pp. 156-57.

Wood-elves are the Silvan Elves of Mirkwood, a branch of the Teleri that remained in Middle-earth. The Light-elves are the Vanyar, the tribe that left Middle-earth to return to the abode of the Valar in the land of Aman. The expression Light-elves is mentioned only this one time; in other places it is Fair Elves: this change is made in order to differentiate between the Vanyar, one of the three tribes, and the more general name *Calaquendi*, 'Elves of Light', a collective term for members of all tribes who went to Aman in the time of the Two Trees. The Deep-elves are the Noldor. 'Deep' is here used to mean 'wise': the Noldor were called Gnomes in early drafts of the mythology, both words adapted from the Greek *gnōsis*, knowledge.¹² Like Gnomes in some accounts, the Noldor are master wrights with the most famous being Fëanor, the smith who made the Silmarils, the three jewels that *The Silmarillion* is named after. The Sea-elves are the Falmari, those of the Teleri who went to Aman.

The passage also features some interesting words that are never used again in Tolkien's writing. The 'Good People' could be a reference to folk beliefs: *Daoine Maithe* meaning 'good people' is one of several euphemisms for the Gentry-type in modern Irish folklore.¹³ The use of this term supports the idea that Tolkien was more favourable towards Celtic Elves in his early writing than he later professed to be. The euphemism can also be simply a way of informing the reader that Elves are not 'wicked folk', if they have heard the opposite: in this case it is a rare occasion where Tolkien is explaining the disposition of his Elves for the reader. This passage also features the only mention of Faerie by Tolkien to refer to a part of Middle-earth. It is used in his early writing to denote the part of Aman inhabited by Elves, later called Elvenhome or Elfinesse.

The Wood-elves are ruled over by the Elvenking, who is in *The Lord of the Rings*

¹² Fimi, *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History*, pp. 46-47. This etymology has been generally accepted, but the *OED* identifies the attribution of the name to a being as arbitrary. *OED* sub 'gnome'².

¹³ MacKillop sub 'Daoine Maithe'.

identified as Thranduil, father of Legolas:

In a great hall with pillars hewn out of the living stone sat the Elvenking on a chair of carven wood. On his head was a crown of berries and red leaves, for the autumn was come again. In the spring he wore a crown of woodland flowers. In his hand he held a carven staff of oak.¹⁴

This is typical of Tolkien's descriptions of Elves: nothing about facial features or clothing (which is in some other cases described by colour). Tolkien instead seems to present the character as associated with features of nature: stone, wood, berries, leaves, flowers. This immediately sets up Thranduil as a king of the forest: it is his role in the narrative that is important, not his character. However, some information regarding his appearance is offered:

The feast that they now saw was greater and more magnificent than before; and at the head of a long line of feasters sat a woodland king with a crown of leaves upon his golden hair, very much like Bombur had described the figure in his dream.¹⁵

The 'golden hair' is all that is offered by way of physical description of the Elvenking and is a feature usually also applied to Legolas since his hair colour is never described. It appears that Tolkien does not place that much emphasis on the appearance of his characters, although the mortal characters tend to have more extensive introductions than the Elves. Legolas gets a similar treatment in *The Lord of the Rings*. As the elvish representative in the Fellowship he is an important character, yet the reader learns very little about him. The manner in which Tolkien introduces Legolas to the reader makes him appear to be a generic Elf, despite the mention of him as 'strange'. Through Legolas's words and actions Frodo, the rest of the Fellowship, and the reader, learn practical, everyday Elf-knowledge: they are light enough not to sink through snow or feel cold, for example.¹⁶ Apart from being the archer of the Fellowship, Legolas is also able to negotiate free passage through Lothlórien, which demonstrates his diplomatic skills as liaison between the Fellowship and the Elves. Legolas has become the template for the Fantasy elf in later texts, and in particular the practical, and

¹⁴ Tolkien, *Hobbit*, p. 160.

¹⁵ Tolkien, *Hobbit*, p. 144.

¹⁶ Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 383.

often archery-talented, elvish member of a fellowship, despite being described as a very unusual Elf in Tolkien's world.

The Fellowship comes into being via the decision at the Council of Elrond that Frodo should take the Ring to be destroyed and that all the other races should have a hand in helping him. The quest is therefore 'Elf-sanctioned' by Elrond as chairman of the meeting and figure of authority. However, Elrond's position is unique as he is of mixed race (he has the epithet 'Half-elven'). He is in fact not described as an Elf at all in *The Hobbit*:

The master of the house was an elf-friend. [...] He was noble and as fair in face as an elf-lord, as strong as a warrior, as wise as a wizard, and as kind as summer.¹⁷

His strength and authority comes from being of mixed race, not only Man and Elf, but also all three tribes of the Eldar as well as having a Maia, a sort of semi-divine spirit, as an ancestor.¹⁸ Tolkien uncharacteristically offers a detailed physical description of Elrond in *The*

Lord of the Rings:

The face of Elrond was ageless, neither old nor young, though in it was written the memory of many things both glad and sorrowful. His hair was dark as the shadows of twilight, and upon it was sat a circlet of silver; his eyes were grey as a clear evening, and in them was a light like the light of stars. Venerable he seemed as a king crowned with many winters, and yet hale as a tried warrior in the fullness of his strength. He was the Lord of Rivendell and mighty among both Elves and Men.¹⁹

Elrond is still not counted among the Elves proper in any part of the books, while only his Elven side was translated into Peter Jackson's 2001-2003 film versions. The intermediate position of Elrond and Arwen was omitted from the plot along with the deep connection between Arwen and Aragorn because they are of the same mixed bloodline that is explained in appendix 3 in *The Lord of the Rings*. Their relationship is instead presented *Romeo and Juliet*-style where Aragorn's humanness and Arwen's Elvishness are accentuated in order to

¹⁷ Tolkien, *Hobbit*, p. 49.

¹⁸ As in Tolkien's writing, Man and Men refers to humans (including human women). Consequently, Elven men will be referred to rather as male Elves unless the phrase 'Elven men' appears in a quotation.

¹⁹ Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 297.

provide an obstacle for their union.²⁰ Aragorn and Arwen are both of the mixed bloodline that came out of the union of a Man, Beren, and an Elf-maiden, Lúthien, whose relationship is mentioned only in passing in the extended edition of *The Fellowship of the Ring* film, while it seems that the film makers have meant for Aragorn and Arwen's relationship to resemble this earlier and more straight-forward romance. The change in ethnicity and character of the relationship is probably to keep the film Hobbit-centred and because there is not time to explain the preceding relationship. There is, however, a reference to Beren and Lúthien in a song sung by Aragorn in the special edition of *The Fellowship of the Ring* and it might come across to a viewer who has not read the books that his relationship to Arwen mirrors that, but it is not explained further.²¹

iv. Elven women

Arwen is described in the books as more Elvish than Elrond, given her likeness to Lúthien:

So it was that Frodo saw her whom few mortals had yet seen; Arwen, daughter of Elrond, in whom it was said that the likeness of Lúthien had come to earth again; and she was called Undómiel, for she was the Evenstar of her people. Long had she been in the land of her mother's kin, in Lórien beyond the mountains, and was but lately returned to Rivendell to her father's house. [...] Such loveliness in living thing Frodo had never seen before nor imagined in his mind; and he was both surprised and abashed to find that he had a seat at Elrond's table among all these people so high and fair.²²

Arwen's mother Celebrían was a pure Elf, the daughter of Galadriel and Celeborn, Lady and Lord of Lothlórien. Celebrían is removed from the narrative already in *The Silmarillion* via the same process that removes other female characters for usually far-fetched and poorly motivated reasons. The fatality rate is particularly high among mothers of all races, though it seems as though they are more likely to die or be incapacitated from grief than from childbirth. Celebrían is attacked by Orcs and while her physical injuries are healed by Elrond,

²⁰ *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, 2001, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, 2002, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, 2003, dir. Peter Jackson, New Line.

²¹ *Fellowship*, Jackson.

²² Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 298.

the emotional hurt makes her abandon her husband and three children (Arwen and the older twins, Elladan and Elrohir) to seek solace in Aman. In a similar way Míriel, mother of Fëanor, the leader and master smith of the Noldor, gives up her Middle-earthly life and travels to Aman due to what appears to be post-natal depression. As it is made out in the narrative in *The Silmarillion*, it is the strain of giving life to Fëanor's spirit rather than his body that has taken its toll, as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Fëanor's wife Nerdanel in effect divorces him after giving him seven sons, an act that might identify her as a stronger character than the two previously mentioned, but it also serves the purpose of removing her from the narrative to produce an all-male family.²³

One strong female Elf and mother is offered in Galadriel, who seems to over-compensate the lack of other strong females to the point where she is revered in a way that draws parallel to the Catholic devotion to Mary.²⁴ However, Galadriel is not superior to Celeborn but instead his equal: Celeborn is addressed as 'Lord of the Galadhrim [who] is accounted the wisest of the Elves in Middle-earth',²⁵ and both are described as 'beautiful', the only place where the word is used for a male Elf.²⁶

v. *Elven places*

The forest of Lothlórien is described by Sam as different from what is to be expected from an Elvish dwelling place, in much the same way that Legolas is 'strange' to Frodo:

'It's sunlight and bright day, right enough,' he said. 'I thought that Elves were all for

²³ This also seems to be the case with Bilbo and Frodo who do not have living mothers or indeed fathers, and never take wives, which are very rare occurrences among Hobbits, and also notably in the case of Denethor, steward of Gondor, and his sons Boromir and Faramir. The wife of Théoden, king of Rohan, is removed without sufficient explanation, as is his sister, the mother of Eówen and Eómer. As William H. Green observes, there are no female characters whatsoever in *The Hobbit*. William H. Green, "'Where's Mama?' The Construction of the Feminine in *The Hobbit*", *The Lion and the Unicorn* 22.2 (April 1998), 188-95. See also Palandiliar, 'Tolkien's Mother-less Heroes', *TheOneRing.net*, <<http://www.theonering.com/docs/13452.html>>, published 12 October 2003, accessed 25 May 2006, and Sandra Miesel, 'The Ladies of the Ring', *Independent Women's Forum*, <http://www.iwf.org/issues/issues_detail.asp?ArticleID=424>, published 1 February 2004, accessed 10 May 2006.

²⁴ See Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 288 (letter 213 to Deborah Webster, 1958).

²⁵ Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 468.

²⁶ Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 465.

moon and stars: but this is more elvish than anything I've ever heard tell of. I feel as if I was inside a song, if you take my meaning.'²⁷

By these two comments from the Hobbits we can discern that the Elves that they have heard about were High Elves from Bilbo and Gandalf and that they consider that to be what is normal for Elves. In fact, the first Elves encountered by the Hobbits in *The Lord of the Rings* are High Elves: Gildor Inglorion and his companions who are trooping through the Shire on their way to the Grey Havens from where they are to sail to Aman.²⁸ Gildor informs Frodo that he is known to the Elves: they have been observing him from a distance for some time without him noticing. Gildor immediately gives the impression of being benevolent yet superior and abstracted. He says,

The Elves have their own labours and their own sorrows, and they are little concerned with the ways of hobbits, or of any other creatures upon earth. Our paths cross seldom, by chance or purpose. In this meeting there may be more than chance; but the purpose is not clear to me, and I fear to say too much.²⁹

Sam, whose immediate motivation for going with Frodo on the quest is to see Elves rather than to protect his master, has this assessment of them after this first meeting:

They seem a bit above my likes and dislikes, so to speak [...] It don't seem to matter what I think about them. They are quite different from what I expected – so old and young, so gay and sad, as it were.³⁰

The Hobbit and *The Lord of the Rings* are based on Hobbit-written sources: the first story is written down by Bilbo and the second by Frodo in a codex known as the Red Book of Westmarch, as is recounted in the part of the prologue to *The Lord of the Rings* entitled 'Note on the Shire Records'.³¹ *The Silmarillion* is, as Tolkien says, 'Elf-centred', and probably

²⁷ Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 460.

²⁸ In Peter Jackson's film version this company are called by Frodo 'Wood Elves', probably to fix the discrepancy between High Elves and the atypical ones that appear in the story: there simply is not time to enlighten the audience about the different types of Elves in the film format. However, the scenes in Lothlórien are set at night in the film, despite the explicit mention of daylight in the book. *Fellowship*, Jackson.

²⁹ Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 112.

³⁰ Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 114.

³¹ Tolkien, *Fellowship*, pp. 19-21.

meant that we should consider it to have been written down by an Elf.³² This scribe might well be Elrond: he is by the Third Age famous for his library and he is also the last person mentioned in *The Silmarillion*, as he at the end of the book and after the One Ring has been destroyed leaves Middle-earth for Aman. From 'Note on the Shire Records' we know that his sons Elldan and Elrohir remained in Rivendell after his departure and that Celeborn also stayed there.³³ However, it is possible that the text in the Red Book referred to as 'Bilbo's translations from the Elvish' is *The Silmarillion*:

These three volumes were found to be a work of great skill and learning in which, between 1403 and 1418, he had used all the sources available to him in Rivendell, *both living and written*. But since they were of little use by Frodo, being almost entirely concerned with the Elder Days, no more is said about them here.³⁴

It is therefore conceivable that *The Silmarillion* is also compiled by a Hobbit while still being Elf-centred.

vi. General characteristics of the Eldar

The process of departure is however not particular to the Third Age. The Eldar are in a constant state of transference: they do not belong properly to Middle-earth or to Aman, and therefore inhabit a liminal space between the realm of the Valar and that of mortals. Again, the majority of Elves in *The Lord of the Rings* are very unusual: while the often overlooked Gildor and his company are more of what Tolkien sees as standard Elves, Legolas is 'strange', Elrond not an Elf proper and Galadriel, Celeborn and the rest of the Galadhrim are unusually rooted in their place of dwelling as well as remarkably diurnal. The majority of the Eldar we see only in *The Silmarillion*, a text not published in Tolkien's lifetime and much less read than *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and therefore the image that Tolkien had in mind as the standard depiction of the Eldar is unknown to the majority of readers. The process of departure does come across in *The Lord of the Rings* even if the history of the

³² Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 237 (letter 181 to Michael Straight, 1956).

³³ Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 21.

³⁴ Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 20 (my emphasis).

Eldar does not: it is autumn for their rule of Middle-earth and they are by now actively passive in the sense that they attempt to stop events from happening by not helping or hindering:

But the Elvish weakness is in these terms naturally to regret the past, and to become unwilling to face change.³⁵

There is then no mystery why they do not more actively partake in the quest. Legolas is therefore a complicated character: he at once represents Elves in general in the Fellowship while he is also a very unusual one: low because of his 'ethnicity' as Silvan Elf and high because he is the son of a king, and also remarkably little characterised in the text.

In contrast to most accounts of elves in myth and folklore, the Eldar have no proper home, and seem to constantly long to be where they are not. The question of belonging is further complicated by the comment by Sam to Frodo about the Elves of Lothlórien:

I reckon there's Elves and Elves. They're all elvish enough, but they're not all the same, now these folk aren't wanderers or homeless, and seem a bit nearer to the likes of us: they seem to belong here, more even than Hobbits do in the Shire. Whether they've made the land, or the land's made them, it's hard to say, if you take my meaning. It's wonderfully quiet here. Nothing seems to be going on, and nobody seems to want it to. If there's any magic about, it's right down deep, where I can't lay my hand on it, in a matter of speaking.³⁶

Lothlórien, then, is different from Rivendell in being less of a refuge in a world where Elves do not really belong, and more of a real home. When Sam says 'they've *made* the land' he is referring to a form of Elvish magic that makes things grow, not chaotically as in Mirkwood, but purposefully in order to cater for the needs of the Elves. Perhaps this is how Elves *make* their home: by directing their magic 'down deep' in nature to make it their own. This is not a case of forcing nature to grow as they please (violent manipulation of nature is the brand of Sauron and Saruman), but rather favouring a kind of sacred fertility. As Elves are already more closely linked with nature than Men, and having the particular favour of the Valar as

³⁵ Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 236 (letter 181 to Michael Straight, 1956).

³⁶ Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 472.

the firstborn, they seem to have the 'first rights' to nature, hence the creation of the Ents and the Huorns. Lothlórien is set in opposition of Mirkwood, being dark and full of evil:

'There lies the fastness of Southern Mirkwood,' said Haldir. 'It is clad in a forest of dark fir, where the trees strive one against another and their branches rot and wither.'³⁷

Elves in the Third Age only lived in Northern Mirkwood, whilst evil dwelled in the south.

The place was originally called Greenwood the Great, and was a good place. Evil did not take up residence there until the Third Age, when the name was changed to Mirkwood (from *Myrkviðr*, meaning 'Darkwood', a forest featured in several Norse sagas and the *Poetic Edda*).³⁸ Even though Sauron and other forces of evil only resided in South Mirkwood,

Thranduil's remaining kingdom is still described as dark and difficult in *The Hobbit*:

The path itself was narrow and wound in and out among the trunks. Soon the light at the gate was like a little bright hole far behind, and the quiet was so deep that their feet seemed to thump along while the trees leaned over them and listened.³⁹

When Tolkien writes dark, he means real darkness, not the kind of twilight that is associated with Elves:

The nights were the worst. It then became pitch-dark – not what you call pitch-dark, but really pitch: so that you could see nothing. Bilbo tried flapping his hand in front of his nose, but he could not see it at all.⁴⁰

Mirkwood, then, is more inspired by myth and fairy-tale than Tolkien's later Elven locations.

The description of the vegetation makes Mirkwood appear more like a forest in Northern Europe than a British one, which further supports the connection to Norse myth. Mirkwood is, as opposed to Lothlórien, not 'made' by the Elves. Long ago this might have been the case, but in the Third Age the negative side of nature, under the influence of evil, has taken over. The opinion put forth by Tolkien with regards to Mirkwood seems to be that nature is

³⁷ Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 461.

³⁸ Jonathan Evans, 'Mirkwood', in Michael D. C. Drout, ed., *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 429-30.

³⁹ Tolkien, *Hobbit*, p. 132.

⁴⁰ Tolkien, *Hobbit*, p. 133.

essentially good, and is only corrupted and turned 'unnatural' by forces of evil. One should also consider that *The Hobbit* is written for children, and that descriptions of frightening or wild forests are common in fairy-tales. The Mirkwood Elves do seem to have found a way of living with this wild nature as created by the influence of Sauron, without desiring to master it.

At the time of the composition of *The Hobbit*, Tolkien had not yet decided on what the Elves of the mythology should be like, and not even conceived the idea of *The Lord of the Rings*. As the Elves of different texts appear at different times in the development of his authorship, it is hard to get a coherent picture. One solution to this inconsistency of character is to see the Elves of the different texts as different beings, or even to consider the world of Arda to be different in different texts. However, there is ample proof that Tolkien did within his lifetime come to some conclusions as to what the Elves should be like. The version of the mythology published as *The Silmarillion* in 1977 by Tolkien's son Christopher seems to be the last word on the Elvish character. Here, the Eldar are noble and near unreachable to mortals, nearly approaching angels in status. The next tale according to this chronology is *The Hobbit*, the first out of these to be completed and in which Elves appear as playful and approachable, much like in fairy tales. *The Lord of the Rings* follows, where a number of very different Elves and places inhabited by them appear, but where the primary Elf character is the member of the Fellowship, Legolas, who is not at all your average Elf. He is, in fact, a 'strange' Elf, different from all the others that Frodo has met. The characterisation of Legolas could then mean that by this time, Tolkien's opinion of the Eldar had become so high that a character who was to perform such duties as would be required by a member of the Fellowship must then necessarily be of the lowest ranking sort, the Silvan Elves. As *The Lord of the Rings* is a Hobbit-centred narrative, it is Frodo's and Sam's opinion about Elves that the reader is to take aboard: while Frodo already is very capable of relating to Elves from

hearing Bilbo's stories, Sam admires them submissively. The combined impression is then that Elves are worthy of reverence, come in many varieties (this we particularly learn from Sam's comments when he learns about them), and some can be practical aiders and even friends.

Chapter 7: A 'Superior Caste': Privilege, Prestige and Race

i. *The Eldar and the hierarchy of Middle-earth*

While descriptions of the Eldar lack detail, their place in the hierarchy of Middle-earth is made quite clear. The Eldar are also called the Firstborns, the first of the non-divine beings to be created and therefore have natural precedence over Men, Dwarves, and the humanoids that developed much later, like Hobbits.¹ Elves are reckoned as one of the three kindreds, along with Men and Dwarves, which makes it hard to see them as a direct counterpart to humans alone, as they have been in past eras. As discussed in the previous chapter, Tolkien's Eldar clearly have features of elves of the past, yet Tolkien moulds this image very much into his own creation. Tolkien knew very well what his Elves represented, but this is only known from his comments and not made clear in the narratives. He explains in a letter to a reader, Naomi Mitchison, in 1954,

But Elves are not wholly good or in the right. Not so much because they have flirted with Sauron; as because with or without his assistance they were 'embalmers'. They wanted to have their cake and eat it: to live in the mortal historical Middle-earth because they had become fond of it (and perhaps because they there had the advantages of a superior caste), and so tried to stop its change and history, stop its growth, keep it as a pleasaunce (*sic*), even largely a desert, where they could be 'artists' - and they were overburdened with sadness and nostalgic regret.²

In an earlier letter to Mrs Mitchison Tolkien states that 'The Quendi are in fact in these histories very little akin to the Elves and Fairies of Europe',³ yet it is clear that the enhanced qualities of Men that the Eldar possess resonate with other types as Significant Others that are described as superior to humans. In their role as 'embalmers', the Eldar are not only witnesses to history but by the Third Age, when *The Lord of the Rings* is set, are actively passive. As Gunnell observes,

¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien [1977] (London: HarperCollins, 1999), p. 45.

² Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 197 (letter 154 to Naomi Mitchison, 1954).

³ Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 176 (letter 144 to Naomi Mitchison (1954). Quendi is an alternative name for Elves or Eldar.

They send no army to Minas Tirith or The Black Gates... and accounts of them fighting Sauron's forces outside Lothlórien are mainly relegated to the Annals given at the end of *The Return of the King*.⁴

Apart from Legolas the only Elves that actively take part in the quest in *The Lord of the Rings* are Elrond's sons Elladan and Elrohir who accompany Aragorn on The Paths of the Dead.⁵ The Galadhrim of Lothlórien are passively helpful to the Fellowship by offering respite, guidance and gifts that are highly symbolic tokens meant to reflect the Elves' appreciation of the Fellowship's members rather than being directly practical in the quest.

Elrond's house in Rivendell provides similar respite but first and foremost organisation. While Elrond chairs the council in which the fate of the One Ring is decided, the possibility of him actively partaking in the quest is not even brought up. At the council Elrond also takes on the role of living history or 'embalmer' and the amount of information provided in the chapter regarding the finding of the One Ring is motivated by the fact that Elrond was there to see it for himself. He then has the authority to decide what must become of the One Ring with the words 'We must send the Ring to the Fire', meaning Mount Doom in Mordor where the Ring was made.⁶ With 'we' Elrond of course means that he himself will dispatch someone to do it. The Elves are in several places in *The Lord of the Rings* criticised for keeping the three Elvish Rings of power that the One Ring is the master of and that are now governed by Elrond, Galadriel and Gandalf, the latest having inherited it from the Círdan the Shipwright, Lord of Mithlond.⁷ The Elvish Rings are considered to compromise the loyalties of their bearers and they are indeed all tempted by the One Ring, yet Gandalf is still part of the Fellowship while Elrond seems to rise above it. Elrond, is, as we know, 'kind as

⁴ Gunnell, 'Tívar in a Timeless Land'.

⁵ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* [1955] (London: HarperCollins, 2001), pp. 50-62.

⁶ Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 350.

⁷ The Nine Rings of Man now sit on the hands of the Nazgul who are in the service of Sauron, while the Seven Rings for the Dwarves have been lost. For criticism of the Elven Rings of Power, see for example *Fellowship*, p. 352. Jason Fisher offers an overview of the Elven Rings but unfortunately does not address this criticism in 'Three Rings for—Whom Exactly? And Why? Justifying the Disposition of the Three Elven Rings', *Tolkien Studies* 5 (2008), 99-108.

summer', and it may be this particular characteristic or the fact that he is only Half-Elven that makes him act somewhat less superior than Elven Men in similar positions and corresponding situations.

Elrond shows some displeasure about Aragorn's wooing of Arwen, but he knows that their union is unavoidable, as this would bring Elven blood back into the line of kings of Gondor and so some Elven elements will remain permanently in Middle-earth. As Fimi observes,

Although Elrond clearly looks down on Aragorn and the race of Man, his words are gentle compared to Thingol's response to Beren's demands of marrying his daughter Lúthien.⁸

The case of the Half-Elven brings a curious clue to what Tolkien believed that his Elves were. It was clear to him that the union of an Elf and a Man must produce a fertile offspring – great parts of narrative would have not been possible otherwise – and he therefore concluded that they must be biologically one race.⁹ The first instance of cross-breeding is as previously mentioned the union of Beren and Lúthien. Lúthien's father Thingol by no means has the even temperament of Elrond. He says to Beren,

Death have you earned with these words; and death you should find suddenly, had I not sworn an oath in haste; of which I repent, baseborn mortal, who in the realm of Morgoth had learnt to creep in secret as his spies and thralls.¹⁰

Beren is suspected of associating with the enemy simply because he is a Man: his ethnicity is proof of his weakness, and not even the narrator criticises Thingol's judgment. Thingol is here expected to kill Beren, but he controls himself for the sake of his daughter, to whom he has sworn not to kill Beren. There is also a question of eugenics: would Thingol tolerate that his grandchild has human blood mixed in? Thingol's unwillingness to allow his daughter to marry a human is a symptom of a collective, cultural philosophy of the Elves: they have been

⁸ Fimi, *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History*, p. 154.

⁹ Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 189 (letter 153 to Peter Hastings, 1954).

¹⁰ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 195.

given the most privileged position as Firstborns by the Valar. To mix their blood with mortals could be seen as heresy, which might be Thingol's problem in this situation. He is one of the few Teleri who has been to Aman and actually met the Valar, and therefore portrayed as more spiritually enlightened and able to understand the Valar's intentions better than the other Elves of Middle-earth. The way Beren finally proves his worth to Thingol is by his bravery and determination. The question is, should we see Beren's noble qualities as particular to the race of Man, or is Beren trying to become accepted as an Elf? The end result of Beren and Luthien's union is that they do become blessed by the Valar. It would have been important to Tolkien to not only describe a lineage that is renewed by blood of semi-divine beings, but also that the controversial union has a sacred blessing. It is also clear that Beren needs to earn the hand of Lúthien in marriage: loving her is not enough because of his naturally inferior status of being a Man.

ii. Thingol and Thranduil as Faerie kings

Thingol ultimately agrees to marry his daughter to Beren if he fetches one of the Silmarils, the wonderful jewels wrought by Fëanor. T. A. Shippey draws a parallel between this and the manner in which the title character impresses the king of Faerie in *Sir Orfeo*.¹¹ Thingol may indeed be seen as a character similar to the Faerie King in folk narratives, and so may Thranduil, the Elvenking of *The Hobbit*. Furthermore, both Thingol and Thranduil live in caves and have control of the forest around them. However, the main Faerie King feature of them is their love for treasure and that they demand that mortals impress and humour them for their grace. Thranduil gets excited about the prospect of Smaug's treasure, and strikes his deal with Bilbo for that reason. As a reward, Bard gives Thranduil the emeralds of Girion, and Bilbo gives him a necklace of silver and pearls.¹² Thingol also receives a necklace, no less than Nauglamír, the Necklace of the Dwarves, from Húrin, father of Túrin, who collected

¹¹ T. A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), pp. 294-95.

¹² Tolkien, *Hobbit*, p. 268 and p. 270.

it in the destroyed city of Nargothrond.¹³ He decides to put the Silmaril Beren got for him in it, as the ultimate display of wealth and power. Are the jewels supposed to be worn by the males themselves, or given to their queens? It seems likely that it is the first as a display of kingly prosperity. If it would be the second, it is the only reference we get to Thranduil having a queen. Thingol and Thranduil are here treated as semi-divine: offerings of this sort belong to the worship of gods in order to avoid their wrath. Indeed, when Thranduil receives Bilbo's gift he calls him not only 'elf-friend' but 'blessed'.¹⁴ The titles Thranduil gives Bilbo are signs that he has proven his worth. In *The Hobbit*, Tolkien describes Thranduil as looking gravely at the Dwarves¹⁵ and that he was 'angrier than ever':¹⁶

It is a crime to wander in my realm without leave. Do you forget that you were in my kingdom, using the roads my people made. [...] I will keep you all in prison until you have learned sense and manners!¹⁷

Bilbo and the Dwarves have not conducted themselves correctly in the presence of the Elves, and the experience must have made Bilbo respect their natural superiority, something he is certain to have conveyed to the other Hobbits in his stories. As mentioned above, there is no introduction to the Elves in *The Lord of the Rings*, and it is clear that the Hobbits know a great deal about them. In this way *The Hobbit* can be seen as the basis of the presumed Elf-knowledge of the reader of *The Lord of the Rings*, even though it is not clear how Tolkien imagined his readers.

iii. Elvish spirituality

It is clear, however, that the natural superiority of the Elves over mortals in his narratives is never questioned. Tolkien's use of 'superior caste' demonstrates that the hierarchy of Middle-

¹³ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, pp. 276-77.

¹⁴ Tolkien, *Hobbit*, p. 270.

¹⁵ Tolkien, *Hobbit*, p. 160.

¹⁶ Tolkien, *Hobbit*, p. 161.

¹⁷ Tolkien, *Hobbit*, p. 161.

earth is seen as natural, 'Valar-given', and is not to be criticised, but also destined to fade from it to give room for the rule of Men:

The doom of the Elves is to be immortal, to love the beauty of the world, to bring it to full flower with their gifts of delicacy and perfection, to last while it lasts, never leaving it even when 'slain', but returning – and yet, when the Followers come, to teach them, and make way for them, to 'fade' as the Followers grow and absorb the life from which both proceed. The Doom (or the Gift) of Men is mortality, freedom from the circles of the world. Since the point of view of the whole cycle is the Elvish, mortality is not explained mythically: it is a mystery of God of which no more is known than that 'what God has purposed for Men is hidden': a grief and an envy to the immortal Elves.¹⁸

This fading is what is in progress at the time of *The Lord of the Rings*: the time of the Elves is ending and they are vacating Middle-earth to make place for the rule of Man. Tolkien speaks of the Elves as being 'consumed' by the fire of their own spirits. In 'Laws and Customs Among the Eldar', the most informative document on the everyday life of the Elves, Tolkien writes:

Moreover, their body and spirit are not separated but coherent. As the weight of the years, with all their changes of desire and thought, gathers upon the spirit of the Eldar, so do the impulses and moods of their bodies change. This the Eldar mean when they speak of their spirits consuming them; and they say that ere Arda ends all the Eldalië on earth will have become spirits invisible to mortal eyes, unless they will to be seen by some among Men in whose minds they may enter directly.¹⁹

The Eldar are, in effect, being burnt up by their brilliance. Their energy goes back into the world to magically fertilise it: this is perhaps the process we see in Lothlórien, with the magic that Sam feels 'deep down' in the earth. The most distinct example of this inner fire is in Fëanor, the master smith of the Silmarils, whose fire burnt so bright that he drew all the life force out of his mother at birth and ultimately and inevitably died by being consumed by fire. Fëanor is described as being 'tall, and fair of face, and masterful, his eyes piercing bright and his hair raven dark.'²⁰ The characterisation by association with light is again present when he

¹⁸ Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 147 (letter 131 to Milton Waldman, 1951).

¹⁹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The History of Middle-earth X: Morgoth's Ring*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 212.

²⁰ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 64.

is compared to his brothers:

Fëanor was the mightiest in skill of word and hand, more learned than his brothers; his spirit burned as a flame. Fingolfin was the strongest, the most steadfast, and the most valiant. Finarfin was the fairest, and the most wise of heart.²¹

Even the male Elves have a kind of effeminate or at least androgynous beauty about them, and the word 'fair' seems to be in most descriptions. Tolkien probably meant the word as an archaic expression for 'beautiful', preferable because it can be more comfortably used for both male and female Elves. It can also of course mean fair and just, as well as light. It is, in short, a word with multiple meanings that are all applicable to Elves. The inner light of the Eldar, the 'Flame Imperishable' given to them by Eru Illúvatar, cannot be confused with any negative connotations of 'fire', in the Christian sense associated with the Devil and Hell, and in the Middle-earthly, Sauron and Mordor. As Stratford Caldecott points out, the most difficult meeting between these two types of fire is when Gandalf the Grey, keeper of the Elvish Ring of Fire, encounters a Balrog, a fire demon.²² He suffers through fire and water, dies in his present body and is sent back by the Valar as the more powerful Gandalf the White. This distinction is complicated further by the connection between the word Eldar and words in the Germanic languages meaning fire. Fire translates as *eldur* in Icelandic, *eldr* in Old Norse, *eld* in Swedish and *ild* in Norwegian and Danish.²³ However, *elf* is not etymologically related to the word *æld*, neither is *Fairy* or *Faerie* to *fair* or *fire*.²⁴

iv. An inner light

As a Catholic, the association of light with goodness and darkness with evil ought to have been self-evident to Tolkien. This is generally the case in his texts, yet as explained above,

²¹ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 60.

²² Stratford Caldecott, *Secret Fire: The Spiritual Vision of J. R. R. Tolkien* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003), p. 108.

²³ OED sub 'fair', adv; OED sub 'fire', n.; Cleasby and Vigfusson sub 'eldr'; John Brynildsen, *Engelsk-Dansk-Norsk Ordbog* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1907) sub 'ild'.

²⁴ Although in some mythological sources, elves and similar beings are referred to as fair. The name of the Welsh tribe Tylwyth Teg means 'The Fair Family'. Evans-Wentz, p. 22.

fire can also be demonic and twilight can be good. Elves, however, possess *fairness* whether they are associated with light or lack-of-light. The 'inner light' suggestion is complicated further by the fact that not all of the named Elves in Tolkien's books are Calaquendi, Elves of Light or High Elves, as opposed to Moriquendi, Elves of Darkness. In fact, it is only the descendants of Finwë and their followers (the Noldor) who came back from Aman who are the High Elves in Middle-earth. The other tribes among the Teleri, the Sindar, Nandor and Laiquendi, did not see the light of the Two Trees in Aman. Does Tolkien then mean that this 'inner light' is only present in those related to the Noldor and the Vanyar? One case for this is the character of Fëanor, creator of the Silmarils, and who spearheaded the expedition back to Middle-earth. His character is dubious, since it is implied that his behaviour is really below his dignity as a High Elf. One can argue the definition of *fairness* here as something just or justified.²⁵ It is, however, unlikely that Tolkien mean that the Teleri and their descendants are excluded from having this 'inner light' and therefore not possessing the *fairness* that I have described above as a general characteristic of the Elves. Expressions associated with light, not like sun and moonlight, but rather starlight and other sorts of more subtle lights, are used throughout the three texts. The more beautiful Tolkien wants to portray a character, the more of this kind of light he says she (for it is often a female) possesses. The most evident example is Lúthien: while she has black hair and associated with twilight, the description of her emphasises light:

Lúthien was the most beautiful of all the Children of Ilúvatar. Blue was her raiment as the unclouded heaven, but her eyes were grey as the starlit evening; her mantle was sewn with golden flowers, but her hair was dark as the shadows of twilight. As the light upon the leaves of trees, as the voice of clear waters, as the stars above the mists of the world, such was her glory and her loveliness; and in her face was a shining light.²⁶

A more metaphorical interpretation of the word *fire* is '[l]uminosity or glowing appearance

²⁵ OED sub 'fair', adv. 4.

²⁶ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 193.

resembling that of fire.’²⁷ It is important that the light of the Elves is this kind of subtle or understated fire. The Elves of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* would not be likely to appreciate roaring fires like the Dwarves, save perhaps Fëanor and Eöl the Smith.

However, the Mirkwood Elves in *The Hobbit* are said to feast in the light of ‘hundreds of torches and many fires.’²⁸ Tolkien seems to have changed his mind about many of the qualities of the Elves between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, although it should also be noted that the Silvan Elves of Mirkwood were more primitive than their kinsmen in Rivendell, Lothlórien and Beleriand. The fires also make sense considering the evil that had to be kept at bay in Mirkwood at that time. It is also important to bear in mind that the fires of these Elves are subject to their magical powers, since they suddenly go out when the Dwarves and Bilbo appear, and are not an untamed force of nature as they would be in the hands of any other race.

v. *The Sindar as Elves of twilight*

No discussion of light and darkness in relation to Tolkien’s Elves is complete without a mention of the Sindar. Sindar means ‘Grey People’ also called ‘Elves of Twilight’, and therefore the troop that can most appropriately be identified as *Döckálfar*. They were a Telerin race who remained in Beleriand under the rule of Elu Thingol the Sindarin version that in the older Elvish language Quenya is Elwë Singollo (the first meaning ‘star-man’, the second ‘grey-cloak’), also sometimes called ‘The Hidden King’.²⁹ The Sindar were neither Elves of Light or Darkness, but something in-between. Technically they should have been Moriquendi since they did not see the light of the Two Trees, apart from Elwë, although they were called Grey Elves by the Noldor as they were not Avari but undertook part of the Great

²⁷ OED sub ‘fire’, n. 10.a. According to this entry, ‘fire’ can also refer to starlight: ‘Starres, hide your fires, Let not Light see my black and deepe desires!’ Shakespeare, *MacBeth*, I.4.il-l..

²⁸ Tolkien, *Hobbit*, p. 144.

²⁹ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 394 and p. 424.

Journey.³⁰ The liminal state of the Sindar is then perhaps representative of the Eldar in general, as they are at once 'fair' and prefer the dark to daylight. The index and appendix to *The Silmarillion* translates Eldar as 'The People of the Stars'. *Eldar* originates in the Elves' first word when waking up and beholding the stars: 'Ele!'³¹ The word in Quenya for fire is *nár* as in Narsil, Narya and Fëanor (Fëanáro meaning 'Spirit of Fire').³² *Nár* originates in Anar, the Sun, the fruit of the golden tree of Aman, Laurelin.³³ By these linguistic notes it can be concluded that two different kinds of light are being referred to: a more original or primitive, subtle light existing before the Sun and Moon, and the light of fire and the Sun itself. The Eldar are nowhere in Tolkien's writing described as having any negative qualities originating from the fact that their race was born before the creation of the Sun and Moon. Instead, one might say that they have some special powers since they are dependent on the Sun and Moon to, for example, be able to see, orientate themselves, or measure time. It is instead the race of Men who depend on them, and would find it very difficult to manage without physical light in the world. The Eldar seem not afraid of physical darkness, as they have this kind of 'inner light'.

vi. *The fallibility of the Eldar*

As a 'superior caste' being the Firstborn children of Illúvatar and gifted with this inner light, the Elves have historically not acted 'wholly good or in the right'.³⁴ Outside their role as 'embalmers' they made the nineteen Rings of Power which the One Ring was then made to control, and thereby contributed to the near-doom of Middle-earth. The Rings were created out of an impulse of improvement, the belief that the Elves could elevate Middle-earth to a near-Valinorian state:

³⁰ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 421.

³¹ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 434.

³² Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, pp. 438-39; strangely, Fëanor is named *before* the creation of the Sun.

³³ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 110.

³⁴ Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 197 (letter 154 to Naomi Mitchison, 1954).

But many of the Elves listened to Sauron. He was still fair in that early time, and his motives and those of the Elves seemed to go partly together: the healing of the desolate lands. Sauron found their weak point in suggesting that, helping one another, they could make Western Middle-earth as beautiful as Valinor. It was really a veiled attack on the gods, and incitement to try and make a separate independent paradise. Gilgalad repulsed all such overtures, as also did Elrond. But at Eregion great work began - and the Elves came their nearest to falling to 'magic' and machinery. With the aid of Sauron's lore they made Rings of Power ('power' is an ominous and sinister word in all these tales, except as applied to the gods).³⁵

There is no question that the Elves believed that they had the right to do so. Tolkien sets this out as misguided rather than masterful, and their status remains unchallenged. They came 'their nearest to falling', but they did not fall. However, the event known as the Kinslaying of Alqualondë, the massacre of the Teleri by the Noldor instigated by Fëanor, is known as Noldolantë, the Fall of the Noldor: Fëanor, the brightest flame of the Eldar, is the only character who is criticised for his superior behaviour, but this is only one among many of his flaws.³⁶ In general this 'Elf-arrogance' passes Tolkien by, and it is evident that he considered their position to be justified. This is also often the case in later Fantasy fictions in the Tolkienian vein, but some writers have observed and criticised it. Terry Pratchett's *Lords and Ladies* is the most distinct example, while superior-acting elvish characters are portrayed as villains in Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* and the *Elfquest* comic by Wendy and Richard Pini, discussed in chapters 10 and 11.

³⁵ Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 152 (letter 131 to Milton Waldman, 1951). Valinor is the dwelling place of the Valar in Aman.

³⁶ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 94.

Chapter 8: Nissi and Neri: On Elven Gender-roles

1. Intention vs. reception

It is quite evident that the gender-roles of Tolkien's Elves are different from what the contemporary reader might be used to, and it is worth looking into why this is. The lack of masculinity of the male Elves certainly came under more humorous scrutiny after Peter Jackson's 2001-2003 films and the way gender is presented in the films has had an impact on views of the gender identity and sexuality of elves in general. This is a process of projecting properties of a particular sort of elf onto the characters that might fall under that category: the particular properties of Tolkien's Elves (such as being tall, having long hair, being associated with nature as well as being warriors, not commonly found among elves in mythology and folklore) is projected onto characters from the past. While elves and the people of the fairy have in the past been described as beautiful, the interpretation of male androgyny as 'gay' is new. The expression 'fairy' for a male homosexual was first recorded in the USA in 1895 and is likely to derive from the feminine character of the flower fairy at this time.¹ It is uncertain what elvish and fairy masculinity was in the medieval period, and it also depends on what you consider an elf to be. Völundr does not appear to be lacking any masculine characteristics, neither do Vidga or Hagen. Auberón has a face of angelic beauty but is also a hunchback dwarf. Males of the fairy people tend to adhere to the chivalric values popular at the time, while elf men in ballads tend to be tyrants, rapists, murderers and abductors, ascribing to the worst sort of male behaviour. It is not until the word 'fairy' begins to be associated with femininity that androgyny and queerness began to be connected to the males of the species. Laurence Houseman's illustrations to Jane Barlow's children's poem *The End of Elfintown* feature many an androgynous male flower fairy, a rare exception from

¹ *OED* sub 'fairy', *n.* and *a.* 5.c.

the consensual image of flower fairies being exclusively female.²

The film versions of *The Lord of the Rings* also helped spread 'Elf awareness' in the sense that people who might not pick up a book by Tolkien went to see the film, and people who might not have much of a concept of what an elf is had one this way. Most Tolkien fans approved of the films and many fan pages appeared on the Internet. Some were intended as generally informative or news pages, while others were fan communities. The films also sparked a great amount of slash fiction and slash art. Slash, by Anna Smol's definition, 'pushes the homosocial into the realm of the sexual';³ Liezl A. Buenaventura clarifies it as 'relationships/sexual acts between two men; usually refers (but is not limited) to fiction and art.'⁴ There is Fictional Person Slash (FPS) and Real Person Slash (RPS); the latter, with regards to *The Lord of the Rings*, refers to the actors in the films. Though slash fiction is on the limit of copyright law, no one has to my knowledge been sued for writing it. Smol says,

No *Lord of the Rings* slash predates the Peter Jackson films, as far as I know, and most slash fiction imagines the characters as they are represented by the actors on the film[.]⁵

It seems as though the films have, by continuing to be 'true' to Tolkien and suppressing the representation of sexual desire, further encouraged speculation, to the point where the actors themselves have had their sexuality put to question. The fact remains that Tolkien's writing is very male-dominated and it is likely that he removed women and therefore sex from the plot as far as he could and to that extent a homosocial world of the text easily becomes queer to the contemporary reader. As Esther Saxey observes,

Women are the possibility of sex; they are the romance plot. Craig (2001) shows how

² Jane Barlow, *The End of Elfintown*, ill. Laurence Housman (London: Macmillan & Co., 1894).

³ Anna Smol, "'Oh...Oh...Frodo!'" Readings of Male Intimacy in *The Lord of the Rings*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 50.4 (Winter 2004), 949-79 (p. 971).

⁴ Liezl A. Buenaventura, *Slash Dictionary*, <<http://www.trinitycross.net/slash/terms.html>>, accessed 26 November 2006, published 2005. For background, see Shoshanna Green, Cynthia Jenkins and Henry Jenkins, 'Normal Female Interest in Men Boking', in Henry Jenkins, ed., *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), pp. 61-88.

⁵ Smol, p. 971.

the absence of female characters can make male bonds look 'queer' as men are forced to behave like women (perform domestic tasks, express 'soft' emotions and form close bonds). But at least with no women present, sex can be nominally ignored. If female characters are then returned to the text, and sex made central to the plot *with the male binds and roles still intact*, the 'queerness' is doubled.⁶

It is the very absence of sex that makes the reader desire to infer it. This is certainly a reasonable reading, but also most certainly against Tolkien's intentions. Considering this evident ambiguity, it is necessary to look at what Tolkien did say about the sexuality and gender roles of his Elves.

ii. *'Laws and Customs Among the Eldar'*

Tolkien's view of Elven gender-roles is made clear in a text called 'Laws and Customs Among the Eldar', henceforth abbreviated as 'Laws', which was written between 1958 and 1960. This seems to have been the time when he was starting to think about the everyday lives of the Elves, since there are other texts on this topic dating from this time, such as 'The History of Galadriel and Celeborn' and 'The Shibboleth of Fëanor'. At this time, Tolkien had finished *The Lord of the Rings* and was setting out in earnest to work on *The Silmarillion*. I will now exemplify the outline of gender-roles we get in 'Laws' by looking at the relationships of Galadriel and Celeborn and Fëanor and Nerdanel. That will be followed by a discussion of some of the difficulties about the characterisation of masculinity and femininity of Tolkien's Elves.

'Laws' is about the Noldor, and it is uncertain how far one can extend what Tolkien says in it to other tribes or races. My main examples are, however, the most famous of the Noldor: Fëanor and Galadriel.⁷ Tolkien begins the section in 'Laws' where he talks about gender by separating the male and female Noldor from mortal men and women by giving

⁶ Esther Saxey, 'Homoeeroticism', in Robert Eaglestone: *Reading The Lord of the Rings* (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 124-37 (p. 137).

⁷ Galadriel is the daughter of Fëanor's half-brother Finarfin. Nerdanel is also a Noldo, daughter of Mahtan the Smith (her mother is never mentioned). – Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 65 and p. 366. Celeborn is a Teleri, son of Elmo, the little-known brother of Elwë (Thingol) and Olwë. Olwë is Galadriel's maternal grandfather, making Celeborn both her uncle and lover. – Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), p. 233.

them different names, nissi for the females and neri for the males. Tolkien is very clear about the gender differences among the Noldor in 'Laws'. He begins the section by saying that 'the neri and nissi of the Eldar are equal, but...' ⁸ and then he goes on to list their differences.

These differences are so polarised that it is tempting to put the activities he names in a table, as below.

<u>Nissi</u> (female)	<u>Neri</u> (male)
Healing	War
Gardening	Hunting
Baking	Cooking
Spinning, weaving and sewing	Smithcraft and woodwork
Playing music	Composing music and making instruments
Storytelling and history	Poetry and linguistics

Because it is so easy to do this, it seems that Tolkien meant these differences to be self-evident. He points them out by saying 'as they [meaning the Noldor] themselves say', ⁹ and talk about the 'natural inclinations' ¹⁰ of the nissi and neri, although he recognises that some of these differences were established by custom. ¹¹ He also says that there is 'less difference between elven-men and elven-women that had not borne child than is seen among mortals', ¹² meaning that the physical differences between nissi and neri are less than in young women and men.

- Healing - war

Healing and care of the body are mainly practised by the nissi. Tolkien says that the only

⁸ Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, p. 213.

⁹ Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, p. 213.

¹⁰ Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, p. 213.

¹¹ Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, p. 213.

¹² Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, p. 213.

reason why nissi make better healers is that they had not seen death, which the neri did in war and hunting. This skill is not contained in the physical disposition or reproductive powers of the nissi, which means that in theory Elven men who had not been to war or done any hunting could make good healers. He means this difference is in the activities rather than inherent gender characteristics. This puts the character of Elrond in a strange position, since he contradicts exactly what Tolkien says in 'Laws', being both a healer and a warrior. Tolkien refers to these natural inclinations of nissi and neri but fails to explain how they are connected to the body or the temperament of Elven women and men. This section in 'Laws' serves to naturalise these gender differences by simply saying 'that's obvious'. It is the 'natural inclinations' of the nissi not to go to war or do any hunting.

- Gardening - hunting

Practical tasks, related to the last topic of healing and war. It seems that Tolkien is trying to tell us that the nissi are naturally nourishing and the neri are good at killing, another example of how human gender-roles are naturalised in the Elves. Considering the Elves' respect for nature, it is likely that they hunted instead of farming on a major scale, which would have meant cutting down forests. There are no references to Elven farming in Tolkien's writing, but it must have occurred since they needed flour for their lembas bread.

- Baking - cooking

Cooking might not be obviously associated with masculinity, but considering the references to hunting, Tolkien probably considered the Noldor to have a diet consisting mostly of meat, in which case it would be more practical to have strong men handling big sides of meat in the kitchen.

- Spinning, weaving and sewing - smithcraft and woodwork

Tolkien says: '[i]nvention and changes [are] mostly brought about by the neri'.¹³ The only new thing the nissi makes are children, although making fabric and costumes is arguably making new things. In this outline that Tolkien gives, it is the neri who invent things that the nissi then use: the neri are the origin of material objects, customs and language.

- Playing music - Composing music and making instruments;
- Storytelling and history - Poetry and linguistics

Neri name things. When Treebeard says 'Elves made all the old words',¹⁴ he means 'Elven men made all the old words'. We are told that Dark-elves taught mortal Men language and music before Finrod Felagund came and helped them refine these skills.¹⁵ Finrod might then be an example of a neri who at least refines music and language. We do get at least one example of a female storyteller: Vëannë tells the tale of Tinúviel to Eriol in the 'Book of Lost Tales'.¹⁶

iii. Elven masculinity

The difference between Elven and mortal masculinity is that Elves, being 'higher' than mortals, have little need for the physical strength associated with manual labour. Instead, Elven masculinity is exactly what is mentioned above: the authority over language, the naming of things, their symbolic authority as Firstborns. The best example of this mode of Elven masculinity is Fëanor. He fulfils his role as a neri with his power over language: he invents a way of writing, the Fëanorian script (Tengwar), and he names the evil Melkor Morgoth, 'the black foe of the world'.¹⁷ But even more power is contained in his spoken word, his oath and his later speech to the Noldor. Fëanor is the son of Finwë, leader of the Noldor, and the chief artificer of the Elves: he makes the silmarils, three wonderful jewels

¹³ Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, p. 213.

¹⁴ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* [1954] (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 73.

¹⁵ See the chapter on Dark-elves. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 163.

¹⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Book of Lost Tales*, part II. (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p 5.

¹⁷ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 83.

capturing the divine light of the Two Trees of Aman. The silmarils are stolen by Morgoth, and Fëanor swears to take them back. Requiring backup for the expedition, he speaks to the gathered Noldor with such fervour that even the Valar are surprised at the power of his words. Fëanor suggests that the Noldor travel to Middle-earth and march on Morgoth's fortress Angband: this is a foolhardy mission, but it does not seem to matter, since his words are emphasised by his symbolic authority, and it is few of the Noldor who are not convinced.

In order to further explain the sons' symbolic act, a discussion of Fëanor's family life is necessary, as it is told in *The Silmarillion*. Already before he is married he is part of the most dysfunctional family of the Noldor: he is very fond of his father, Finwë, and tries very hard to make him proud, his mother Míriel has given up the spirit, he does not care for his stepmother Indis, and has a complicated relationship with his half-brothers Fingolfin and Finarfin. He marries Nerdanel and has seven sons, as one would if one really wanted to prove one's masculinity. It is said that Fëanor is violent, but Tolkien does not specify how or towards whom. Are we to believe that he picks fights with other neri, or is he violent against his family, meaning that he beats Nerdanel or his sons? We are told that Nerdanel finally tires of his mood and moves back to her father's house, at which point Fëanor says that she may never see her sons again. Our contemporary reading of their somewhat disturbing marriage becomes a demonising of the abusive husband and pity for the poor woman, as these kinds of event are often reported in the media. Tolkien does say that Nerdanel is no angelic victim, but her moodiness is totally overshadowed by Fëanor's über-moodiness. There can only be one in this sort of relationship possessing the kind of symbolic authority mentioned before. The reader is informed that

Nerdanel also is firm of will but more patient than Fëanor, desiring to understand minds rather than to master them, and at first she restrained him when the fire in his heart grew too hot; but his later deeds grieved her, and they became estranged. Seven sons she bore to Fëanor; her mood she bequeathed in part to some of them, but not to

all.¹⁸

This passage might give us a clue to the sons' decision to leap to their father's side. Tolkien seems to be saying that the sons do not belong more to their mother than to their father, or vice versa, but it is the choice they make to take the oath that decides this. This preference for Fëanor over Nerdanel is due to their desire to prove their worth to Fëanor and be accepted as Elven men, as *neri*. If they had been daughters, their 'natural inclinations' would have made them remain with their mother, since the *nissi* would not desire this symbolic authority. Except, of course, in the case of Galadriel, as discussed below.

Fëanor's sons must be separated from their mother in order to find identities as Elven men. They all preferred their mother-names but ended up being called the Sindarin form of their father-names, another example of Fëanor's power over language. By making the choice to take the oath, the sons also take the same path as Fëanor, and most of them end up as wicked and selfish as him. Fëanor makes it impossible for his sons to see their mother again when he sets off with them to Middle-earth. Although the sons are quite grown up, the youngest twins, Amrod and Amras very much desired to see his or their mother again.¹⁹ They wanted to remain with their ship in order to secretly return, but Fëanor burnt that ship first. Tolkien seems to suggest that if Amrod and Amras had gone back to be with their mother, they would develop qualities of the *nissi*. It is important that the *neri* develop these at least symbolically masculine interests and skills, especially since their appearance might compromise their physical masculinity.

Elven men cannot count on their appearance to be considered masculine, they have to act like it. Elven men are only masculine insofar as they are reminiscent of human men, who

¹⁸ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 65.

¹⁹ Or only one of them. There is some confusion as to which of the twins went by the name Ambarussa and which is called Ambarto. The mother name is the first name that an Elf child is given, the father name the one they receive when they come of age. 'The Shibboleth of Fëanor', J. R. R. Tolkien, *The History of Middle-earth XII: The Peoples of Middle-earth* ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2002), pp. 353-54.

set the standard for what is considered as masculine in Tolkien's writing. Holly A. Crocker suggests that masculinity in Tolkien's writing is primarily a quality of the race of Men, and that the definition of the human man is that he is masculine.²⁰ The human mode of masculinity and femininity must correspond to the presumptions concerning gender-roles that the reader has, in order for the humans to be recognisable as such. In the Dwarves, on the other hand, there is a kind of hyperbolic masculinity which affects the whole race, since even the Dwarf women are bearded. The problem with identifying the male Elves as men is that they are described as beautiful or fair in most cases, as already discussed. It would be hard to make the Elves Elvish enough without making them beautiful. Elves and fairies are usually portrayed as possessing beauty beyond the measure of mortals in medieval texts, but as already mentioned, this usually only applies to the males. The beautiful androgynous males are instead an inheritance from Victorian flower fairies and the appreciation for the dainty: however much Tolkien might have despised flower fairies, he did follow Victorian aesthetics in his portrayal of the Eldar. Peter Jackson's film also used Art Nouveau lines in the iconography of the Elves, inspired by the style popular around the time of Tolkien's childhood and youth that also had an appreciation for androgynous male and female bodies, as mentioned above.

iv. Elven femininity

The only female Elf who plays a major part in *The Lord of the Rings* is Galadriel. Consequently she fulfils many roles: near-goddess, mother and Ringbearer. She is the noblest of the ladies of the Noldor, and notably unfriendly to Fëanor, her uncle. One reason is that Galadriel would not give Fëanor some of her hairs, which looked like they had caught the light from the Two Trees of Aman. But Galadriel also distrusted Fëanor in general and she is not convinced by his speech, unlike most of the Noldor. 'Laws' claims that the nissi does

²⁰ Holly A. Crocker, 'Masculinity', in Robert Eaglestone, ed., *Reading The Lord of the Rings* (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 111-23 (p. 111).

healing, produce nothing new except for children, and they do not possess the symbolic authority of the neri. There is, however, a problem with this characterisation of the nissi if one looks more closely at Galadriel. She possesses much authority, and there is an explanation for this: her mother-name is Nerwen, meaning man-maiden; she is big and strong and has a voice deeper than is customary for the women of the Noldor; in her youth she was a keen athlete, matching even the neri of the Noldor.²¹ It is quite common for writers to give women masculine qualities in order for them to be seen as strong, hence Eowyn, the shield-maiden of Rohan, who goes to war disguised as a man. The supposed strength Galadriel gets from these masculine qualities might explain why she is chosen to bear the ring Nenya, and her right to rule over Lothlórien. Her authority as a member of a prominent Noldorin family, her position as a Ringbearer and her personal qualities makes her equal to her husband Celeborn. The couple are spoken of as in equal terms as the lord and lady of Lothlórien. While Celeborn is not as prominent as she is, he is called 'the wisest of the Elves of Middle-earth and a giver of gifts beyond the power of kings'²² and 'Sindarin prince'. In 'The Shibboleth of Fëanor', Tolkien clearly states that Galadriel wedded Celeborn *later* in Beleriand.²³ So, Galadriel chose Celeborn as her lover before they were married, which contradicts what Tolkien says in 'Laws' about the taboo on sex before marriage and is an example of how Tolkien allows her to be strong-willed.

The few women that play a part in *The Lord of the Rings* tend to be idealised and remote. Arwen, in the books, does not have much presence and importance to the story, and is little more than a trophy wife of Aragorn. Her role was changed in the Peter Jackson films to a more active character, in an attempt to update the view on women we get from Tolkien. Galadriel and Goldberry are portrayed as more goddess-like and other-worldly. In a sense,

²¹ Tolkien, *The Peoples of Middle-earth*, p. 337.

²² Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 468.

²³ Tolkien, *The Peoples of Middle-earth*, p. 347.

their agelessness makes them representatives of the eternal feminine rather than mere mortal characters. Saxey suggests the peripheral position of the women in *The Lord of the Rings* to be because Tolkien thought that if he removed women as far as possible from the plot, he would also remove the sexual dimension of the characters.²⁴

v. *Homosociality*

It seems likely that Tolkien removed women from the narrative to such an extent because it would make sexual relations impossible or at least diminish the importance of sex. However, this strategy is not that successful in an age when homosexual relationships are perfectly imaginable and, in the wake of queer theory, popularly applied to close relationships between men where sexual activities are not described. The abundance and close relationships of the male character and lack of female ones is precisely what facilitates such an interpretation, while it was evidently not Tolkien's intention. Esther Saxey notes that

any comparison with our world shows us that these frameworks do not exclude sex as effectively as Tolkien might have wished - servants and masters, captains and soldiers, kings and subjects have all had sexual relationships. Sexuality is not prohibited by such relationships. But these models do mean that sex is not central to the narrative; a sexual reading is made optional.²⁵

She suggests that sexuality is not central to the story in *The Lord of the Rings* while it can be readily implied, and that the film adaptations actively encourage the audience to invest in relationships. In the novel, sex is not central to the plot; it is optional, and one can imagine as much or as little as one likes. In the film adaptation, the viewer is encouraged to emotionally invest in romance, and seek out and speculate about it, with contradictory effects; the viewer may notice how flimsy the heterosexual relationships are in contrast with the male-male bonds, how much more the men admire and owe one another.²⁶ A queer reading of *The Lord of the Rings* is made possible by the fact that the harder Tolkien tries to get away from and

²⁴ Saxey, p. 136-37.

²⁵ Saxey, p. 133.

²⁶ Saxey, p. 135.

suppress the sexual dimension of his characters, the more it seethes underneath the surface. It is even this unwillingness to talk about sex that makes the narrative queer: male characters perform the duties of women (Sam's 'domestic' chores), and displaying tender emotions man to man, without any mention of women or femininity.

Not even the presumably masculine Aragorn and Boromir are immune to the queer gaze: Aragorn kissing Boromir on the forehead in his death scene has been interpreted as a small sign of their true feelings.²⁷ In the films, the most obviously sexual scene is when Aragorn is rejoined with Arwen in a dream or memory, in *The Two Towers*. She is lightly dressed, and they kiss and cuddle. However, this is not a scene that has been picked up particularly by fans: it is instead the less obvious scenes which still point to some kind of physical intimacy between the men, like Aragorn kissing the dead Boromir, or the hug he gives Haldir when the Elven host arrive at Helm's Deep. Saxey argues that in the same way as *Xena Warriorprincess* appeals to a male audience despite allegedly having a relationship with her faithful companion Gabrielle, it is the male bonds in the *Lord of the Rings* films, rather than the heterosexual love interests, that appeal to straight female and gay male fans. As Saxey says, 'Women's pleasure at seeing attractive men in homoerotic situations, has...been *underestimated*'.²⁸ She goes on to take the example of Orlando Bloom as Legolas having the same kind of affection to Aragorn as he does as Will Turner to Captain Jack Sparrow in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* films.

vi. *Slash fiction*

Most, if not all, of the *Lord of the Rings* slash fiction appeared after Peter Jackson's films, and so did most of the queer readings. The fans' appetite for everything *Lord of the Rings* does not limit itself to the original trilogy; they want more of what has been left out. The most common theme in slash fiction is extending Frodo and Sam's relationship into the

²⁷ Saxey, p. 133.

²⁸ Saxey, p. 130.

sexual. Among the Elves it is Haldir and Legolas who feature most often, although I would estimate there to be slash fiction featuring all the named male Elves. Slash fiction is most often written by straight girls and women, not gay men as one might expect. Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins's investigations found that the female slash writer often

rejects the idea that her interest in slash involves identification with the characters, asserting a pleasure in exerting her own authorial control over sexy male bodies[.]²⁹

On the other hand, Smol reiterates Camille Bacon-Smith's argument that

the heterosexual women who mainly write in the genre are less concerned with issues of gay identity and more with expressing their own sexual desires through their identification with attractive male characters who are more interesting than the women usually represented in their source texts.³⁰

However, slash fiction has proven a vent for the homosexual interpretations of Tolkien's writing, and a way not only for women to take control of the male characters, but also investigate further what Tolkien tried to avoid, namely emotional relationships and sexuality.

The stories are seldom hardcore pornography, and often use the same kind of formal language as the original material. Instead, Slash Fiction spells out what is only implied in the book and films, which might be a satisfaction to readers who do want to find queer elements in them. Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins suggest that '[s]lash is what happens when you take away those barriers [of confirmative Western masculinity] and imagine a new kind of male friendship might look like.'³¹ The owner of the gay friendly *Lord of the Rings* fansite Bag End Inn, Ms Allegro says:

It's about time Western (especially American) culture realized that love and devotion to a friend, or even romantic love, is not an unmasculine characteristic, or something to be derided....would that many young men in our culture today understood this as easily and clearly, and embraced the love they have for their friends, regardless of how that manifests itself, instead of fearing it.³²

The response to the films has certainly opened possibilities for more queer interpretation of

²⁹ Green, Jenkins and Jenkins, p. 69.

³⁰ Smol, p. 974.

³¹ Smol, p. 974.

³² Smol, p. 970.

Tolkien's fiction. Male elves in modern Fantasy have been perceived as beautiful, androgynous and homoerotic before the films were made, and the portrayal of Elven men in the films correlated with this image, allowing for further blending of these characters. This also points to a desire to perceive elves as sexually transgressing, adding to their already established liminal position of having human-like appearance and behaviour, and completely alien features.

vi. 'Manly' masculinity

The extension of homosociality into homosexuality is sometimes interpreted as threatening the norms of male companionship and masculinity. Tolkien's intention with the homosocial setting was presumably to allude to the all-male environments that he had himself experience from, for example the universities that he taught at and his service in the First World War. These kinds of all-male environments are no longer readily found, and the references to 'fellowship' fail to resonate with a modern audience. Masculinity has moved on, and the close relationships between males become reinterpreted. When scrutinising masculinity in Tolkien's writing, one must also question whether it is reasonable to expect the same mode of masculinity from all the races in Middle-earth. Holly A. Crocker defines masculinity in *The Lord of the Rings* as a quality of the race of Man:

In one sense, to speak of masculinity in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is ridiculous, since Men are just one group among an assortment of *kinds*, including Hobbits, Elves and Dwarves.³³

She uses the example of Aragorn to point to a new kind of masculinity emerging with the Dominion of Men after the time of the Elves: Aragorn is informed by the Elves rather than being considered to be one of them. He is not, as the Elves are, an owner of language (he does not name anything), but he is holder of symbols (sword, crown). Crocker says,

Aragorn's personal affiliations with the Elves are most pronounced in the trilogy; yet

³³ Crocker, p. 111.

through his association with all these groups, who 'shall fade or depart' with the coming 'Dominion of Men', a new model of masculinity emerges that consolidates power through its claim to invisibility.³⁴

She later clarifies this invisibility:

The masculinity must emerge into the field as invisible, which means that its revelation must appear to present that which was already perceived though never acknowledged by anyone.³⁵

Aragorn's brand of masculinity is not defined by physical and emotional strength as in the case of his ancestors Elendil and Isildur, but rather a hybrid of Manliness and the symbolic value of Elven masculinity. The masculinity of male Elves, then, lies less in their physical strength and more in their symbolic authority as firstborns, originators of language, keepers of symbol, and formulators of the law. As Crocker observes, masculinity is primarily a quality of the race of Men. This argument can be extended to suggest that male Elves are only masculine insofar as they are reminiscent of or imitate male Men. One of the definitions of Tolkien's Elves is that they are beautiful, and that beauty really means feminine beauty, since the meaning is defined by men. This kind of androgynous beauty has become an essential part of Elfishness in Fantasy fiction produced after Tolkien, as chapter 12 will go on to discuss. One might compare it to the beardedness of Dwarves, or their skills as smiths. One might even say that smith-ness is an essential quality of the Dwarves, explaining, for example, why Eöl in *The Silmarillion* is described as having Dwarven qualities since he is a smith. While the appearance of Elves is often rationalised to a few positive adjectives denoting beauty, nobility and goodness, the character of the Dark-elf seems to offer a departure from this model, and therefore requires closer scrutiny.

³⁴ Crocker, pp. 116-17.

³⁵ Crocker, p. 118.

Chapter 9: Illuminating the Dark-elf

1. The term 'Dark-elf'

'Dark-elf' has become a popular expression in Fantasy fiction and art as well as popular culture. It is often thought that the term refers to a being from folklore also called drow, trow or dreugh. While a being called by these names is found in Shetlandic folklore, it has no connection to elves, fairies or any other being of human semblance.¹ The modern meaning of Dark-elf or drow is a dark-skinned and usually evil elf and appears to have been created in the Dungeons and Dragons role-playing game. Tolkien frequently used the word Dark-elf but his version of the character is very different. While the Dungeon and Dragons character is based on Tolkien's Dark-elf, the deeper meaning has been lost. Tolkien's Dark-elf is one kind among many other Elf tribes that make up a complex hierarchy which is very informative of Tolkien's presentation of the Elf as Other. As mentioned before, there are three main tribes: Vanyar, Noldor and Teleri. In Tolkien's meaning, a Dark-elf is any Elf who has not been to Aman in the time of the Two Trees and been 'blessed' by their light. This blessing is then passed on genetically. An Elf who has not seen the Two Trees of Aman, nor has an ancestor who has, is technically a Dark-elf. The Elves were called to Aman by the Valar and the refusal to heed to their will is in Tolkien's cosmology considered as heretical, even if the main reason why the Dark-elves stayed in Middle-earth was because of their love and care for the land. Nevertheless, the Dark-elves displayed free will and therefore end up at the bottom of the Elvish hierarchy whatever their tribe. However, it seems that most of the Dark-elves are Teleri, already the lowest ranking tribe, which tells us that Tolkien might consider the low to be predisposed to sink lower. It is also clear that Tolkien considered Elves to be above Men as a general rule, and that he made many of the Elvish characters that interact the most with Men and other mortals Dark-elves. In the Dark-elf he had a type of character that is

¹ Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology*, pp. 164-71.

still an Elf but not as elevated and holy as for example the angelic Vanyar, and that can actually actively contribute to the Quest and other activities incorporating mortals.

ii. Character of the Dark-elf

The Dark-elves often feature in texts about the First and Second age to point out the superiority of the Light-elves, or in general that of the Vanyar and Noldor over the Teleri. Interestingly, most of the Elves encountered in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are Dark-elves but are still described as far above mortals. It may be that Tolkien elevated his Elves (the Vanyar and the Noldor) to an extent that they became so superior to Men, Dwarves and Hobbits that they would be reluctant to mix with them. The Dark-elves, then, became a solution: they were still Elves, immortal, possessing beauty and knowledge far beyond mortals, yet they were not as 'divine' as the other tribes. It is also significant that the Dark-elves seem to suffer a kind of identity crisis in Tolkien's writing: in some places, the word is used to signify any Elf who has not been to Valinor, or a descendant of someone who has, but in other places they are described as wanderers in the wild lands of east and south Beleriand, knowing little or nothing about the Valar and therefore practically atheists. In *The Silmarillion*² the word Dark-elf is used sparingly and mainly to describe negative qualities, such as in the characterisation of Eöl (see below). Tolkien still needed to explain the 'class-difference' between Light-elves and Dark-elves. This is the phrasing used:

They dwelt by the sea, or wandered in the woods and mountains of the world, yet their hearts were turned towards the West. Those Elves the Calaquendi call the Úmanyar, since they came never to the land of Aman and the Blessed Realm; but the Úmanyar and the Avari alike they called the Moriquendi, Elves of the Darkness, for they never beheld the Light that was before the Sun and Moon.³

Avari, then, is the name of the Elves who did not take part in the Great March, and Úmanyar are those who abandoned it along the way, making Avari more 'proper' Dark-elves. The

² This word in italics is used for the text published in 1977; earlier versions are given in inverted commas and with approximate year(s) of being worked on/abandoned.

³ Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, p. 51.

reason for this is that it was the will of the Valar that the Elves should go to Valinor to be kept safe from Melkor and his agents, and the Avari, called 'the Unwilling', did not pay heed to their masters' calling.⁴ They are therefore denying the authority of the Valar, which Tolkien means to be selfish and disrespectful.

iii. The Sindar or Grey-elves

However, Tolkien did not describe all Dark-elves as lost. He considered the Sindar, in particular the Grey-elves of Doriath, to be the most elevated of the Teleri of Beleriand. The following description originally used in 'Sketch of the Mythology' (1926-30) made its way in similar form into *The Silmarillion*:

In the early days Eldar and Men were of nearly equal stature and power of body, but the Eldar were blessed with greater wit, skill, and beauty, and those (the Gnomes) who had dwelt in Côr (Koreldar) as much surpassed the Ilkorins as they surpassed mortals. Only in the realm of Doriath, whose queen was of divine race, did the Ilkorins equal the Koreldar.⁵

And the corresponding version in *The Silmarillion*:

In those days Elves and Men were of like stature and strength of body, but the Elves had greater wisdom, and skill, and beauty; and those who had dwelt in Valinor and looked upon the Powers as much surpassed the Dark-elves in these things as they in turn surpassed the people of mortal race. Only in the realm of Doriath, whose queen Melian was of the kindred of the Valar, did the Sindar come near to match the Calaquendi of the Blessed Realm.⁶

Here Elves has replaced Eldar, Sindar Ilkorins and Calaquedi Koreldar, yet the meaning remains: the Sindar were superior to other Dark-elves because their king Thingol had been to Valinor and their queen Melian was a Maia. Melian was always identified as higher than the Elves, although by different names: in 'Sketch of the Mythology' she is said to be 'of divine race',⁷ in 'Qenta Noldorinwa' (1930) she is 'a fay',⁸ and in the 'Grey Annals' (1951-2) she is

⁴ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 49.

⁵ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The History of Middle-earth IV: The Shaping of Middle-earth*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 21.

⁶ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, pp. 116-17.

⁷ Tolkien, *Shaping*, p. 21.

⁸ Tolkien, *Shaping*, p. 85.

first mentioned as a Maia.⁹ By their guidance, the whole tribe of the Sindar become elevated despite being inferior to the Light-elves. Christopher Tolkien elaborates on the description of the Sindar as superior in a note to 'Sketch of the Mythology':

The 'higher culture' that my father came to ascribe the Elves of Doriath (or more widely to the Grey-elves of Beleriand) is now established ('only in the realm of Doriath...did the Ilkorins equal the Koreldar'); contrast the description of the Ilkorins of Tinwelint's [Thingol's] following in the old *Tale of Tinúviel* ('eerie they were and strange beings, knowing little of light and loveliness or of musics...') concerning which I noted that Tinwelint's people are described in terms applicable rather to the wild Avari of *The Silmarillion* [...] It is however said in this passage of the tale that 'Different indeed they became when the Sun arose'.¹⁰

In *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien clarifies Thingol's identity: 'king though he was of the Úmanyar, he was not accounted among the Moriquendi, but with the Elves of Light, mighty upon Middle-earth.'¹¹ This is a change from 'Qenta Noldorinwa', where it is clearly stated that Thingol never went to Valinor.¹² This change is because Thingol later became identified as the Elwë who was the envoi of the Teleri in Valinor. Originally Elwë was brother of Thingol instead of being the former name of him, while Thingol/Elwë's brother was later renamed Olwë.¹³ It is stated later in *The Silmarillion* that although the Sindar 'were Moriquendi, under the lordship of Thingol and the teaching of Melian they became the fairest and the most wise and skilful of all the Elves of Middle-earth.'¹⁴ The Sindar, then, are 'better' than the other Dark-elves of Beleriand. However, Thingol is not the only one mentioned as king of Dark-elves: Tolkien attributes this status also to Fingolfin in the 'Earliest Annals of Beleriand' (1930). In the entry for the year 51 in the first version, it is said that he 'holds the North-west and all Hithlum, and is overlord of the Dark-elves west of Narog.'¹⁵ In the second version he

⁹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The History of Middle-earth XI: The War of the Jewels*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 5.

¹⁰ Tolkien, *Shaping*, p. 51.

¹¹ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 55.

¹² As for example in 'Qenta Noldorinwa' (1930), *Shaping*, p. 85.

¹³ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The History of Middle-earth V: The Lost Road and Other Writings*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (New York: Del Rey, 1996), p. 492.

¹⁴ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 99.

¹⁵ Tolkien, *Shaping*, p. 296 and p. 316.

was 'overlord of the Dark-elves as far south as Eglordest and west of Eglor; and he was king of Hithlum and Lord of the Falas or Western Shore'.¹⁶ Círdan the Shipwright, later Lord of the Falas, was not created at this point. This is, however, the only point where Fingolfin is described as lord of Dark-elves because Tolkien later decided that the Dark-elves were Teleri and Fingolfin Noldorin and therefore a Light-elf. Another one-off mention is in the 1958 'Quenta Silmarillion', where Christopher Tolkien notes that:

'But Inglor was king of Nargothrond and over-lord of all the Dark-elves of the western havens...' was rewritten as 'But Finrod was king of Nargothrond and over-lord of the Dark-elves of Beleriand between Sirion and the Sea, save only in the Falas... Their lord was Círdan the Shipbuilder.'¹⁷

Another name confusion occurs here: Originally Finrod was the name of the brother of Fingolfin and youngest son of Finwë, later called Finarfin. Finrod was then given to his son, originally Inglor. Yet more confusingly, the first Elf encountered by the Hobbits in *The Lord of the Rings* introduces himself as 'Gildor Inglorion of the House of Finrod',¹⁸ that is, Gildor, son of Inglor. Tolkien never elaborated on this name but it suggests that if Gildor is not the son of Finrod, Gildor's father might have been another descendant of Finrod, given his original name. It is clear that Tolkien decided on the names and characteristics of the different tribes of the Elves fairly late, and would probably have explained and expanded this further if he would have finished *The Silmarillion* himself.

iv. Eöl, the Dark-elf

A character said to be related to Thingol and therefore one of the elevated Sindar is Eöl, yet he earns the epithet 'the Dark-elf' in most sources, and on him all that is bad about the Dark-elves is projected. The story of Eöl and his family was extended as late as the 1958 'Quenta Silmarillion', having only been mentioned briefly before. Eöl lives alone in the forest of Nan Elmoth, having shunned his relations in Doriath. There he practices his smithcraft and has

¹⁶ Tolkien, *Shaping*, p. 330.

¹⁷ Tolkien, *Jewels*, p. 197.

¹⁸ Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 106.

good relations with the Dwarves of the Blue Mountain. He finds Aredhel (originally Isfin), daughter of Fingolfin, king of the Noldor, lost in his forest and forces her to stay with him (in *The Silmarillion* it is said that Aredhel was not 'wholly unwilling').¹⁹ The union produces a son, Maeglin. Once he is grown and Eöl is away, mother and son set out for Gondolin and Aredhel's brother Turgon. Eöl tracks them down there and confronts them in Turgon's hall, throwing a javelin at Maeglin which hits Aredhel and she dies. Eöl is thrown off the town wall, while Maeglin remains in Turgon's household. Throughout the story, Eöl's ethnicity is pointed out in negative terms. The following passage from *The Silmarillion* has been interpreted by Christopher Tolkien as support for identifying Eöl as a Moriquendi.²⁰ Turgon says:

I will not debate with you, Dark-elf. By the swords of the Noldor alone are your sunless woods defended. Your freedom to wander there wild you owe to my kin; and but for them long since you have laboured in thralldom in the pits of Angband[.]²¹

Even in *The Silmarillion*, Dark-elves by this name are seen as negative, despite the fact that all of the Teleri of Beleriand except Thingol are technically defined as such. It is likely that Tolkien decided on the term Moriquendi instead of Dark-elf in *The Silmarillion* to avoid these kinds of negative connotations: the few instances where the term is mentioned it refers to Eöl or wandering Elves with little regard for their more 'civilised' kin in Doriath. Tolkien pondered in a note to the 1951-2 version of 'Maeglin' about the nature of the Dark-elf with regards to Eöl. He says that Dark-elves were 'imagined as wandering about and often ill-disposed towards the Light-elves', but that this was 'before the history and geography had been organized'.²² He notes to himself to extend his writing about the Dark-elves ensnared by Morgoth/Melkor, and says that '[i]t would explain much about Eöl and his smithcraft'.²³ This

¹⁹ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 154.

²⁰ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 388.

²¹ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 159.

²² Tolkien, *Jewels*, p. 320.

²³ Tolkien, *Jewels*, p. 320.

reference is to a rejected or forgotten idea to make the Dark-elves darker, as beings in an intermediate stage between the general meaning of Dark-elf (Elves who have not been to Valinor) and Orcs. This kind of character would refer more directly to the *svartálfar* and *dökkálfar* of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*.²⁴ There are, however, similarities between the character of Eöl and that of Völundr in 'Völundarkviða' in the *Poetic Edda*.²⁵ Völundr is also a smith and described as a 'prince of elves.'²⁶ We learn nothing of the colour of his hair but it is said that the Valkyrie Alvit 'wound her arms around the white neck of Volund.'²⁷ Eöl's appearance is described as 'a tall Elf, dark and grim, of the kindred of the Sindar',²⁸ 'noble though grim of face',²⁹ and 'proud and sullen'.³⁰ It seems as though Tolkien is trying to at once point out Eöl's nobility (as a general elvish characteristic) and his lowliness as a Dark-elf. Here, there are no non-Elvish characters present for Eöl to be superior to, and so he is the lowest of the company. We are told that his son Maeglin is 'tall and black-haired; his eyes were dark, yet bright and keen as the eyes of the Noldor, and his skin was white.'³¹ In 'Qenta Noldorinwa' (1930) he is said to be 'swart but comely, wise and eloquent, and cunning to win men's hearts and minds.'³² Maeglin also develops into a villainous character: he woos his cousin Idril, despite the fact that Elves never marry such close relations and that Idril prefers the Man Tuor. Maeglin takes his chance during the fall of Gondolin when he captures Idril and her seven-year-old son Eärendil and 'laid hands' on them. He is thrown by Tuor off the walls of Gondolin, like his father years before.³³ The characterisation of Eöl also points out the general superiority of the Noldor over the Teleri, in particular in Turgon's words to him

²⁴ Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, pp. 19-20. For further elaboration on Tolkien's use of elves from Norse texts, see Tom Shippey, 'Light-elves, Dark-elves, and Others'.

²⁵ Larrington, *Poetic Edda*, pp. 102-8.

²⁶ Larrington, *Poetic Edda*, p. 104 and p. 107.

²⁷ Larrington, *Poetic Edda*, p. 103.

²⁸ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 158.

²⁹ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 154.

³⁰ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 159.

³¹ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, pp. 154-55.

³² Tolkien, *Shaping*, p. 140.

³³ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 291.

in Gondolin.

v. *Saeros/Orgof*

This negative view of the Dark-elf is also present in the characterisation of Saeros in *The Silmarillion*, in earlier texts called Orgof. The first mention of Orgof is in 'Sketch of the Mythology' (1926-30), where he is said to be 'of the kin of King Thingol'³⁴ He taunts the Man Túrin, although in what way is not specified. Túrin slays him by throwing a drinking horn in his face and thereby condemns himself to exile. In 'Qenta Noldorinwa' (1930), Orgof is said to slight the maidens and wives of the Men of Hithlum, thereby subjecting himself to Túrin's rage. He is here described as 'a foolish Elf [...] with his rough garb and strange looks'.³⁵ It is not until the 1937 'Quenta Silmarillion' that Orgof is described as 'one of the Dark-elves',³⁶ but he is now no kin of Thingol. Here it is Túrin who is poorly dressed and thus taunted by Orgof. Orgof continues to question the civility of Men and it is when he comments on the decency of their women that Túrin throws the drinking vessel in his face. The version that made it into the published *Silmarillion* is much the same apart from the end of the episode: in this, the drinking vessel does not kill Saeros, as he is now called. Instead, Saeros confronts Túrin the following day, there is a struggle, and Túrin sends him running naked through the woods. Saeros falls into a stream and dies hitting a rock in the water.³⁷ In this version, Saeros is described neither as Dark-elf nor kinsman of Thingol but as 'one of the people of the Nandor, high in the counsel of the King'.³⁸ The character of Orgof/Saeros has thus gone from 'foolish Elf' to 'Dark-elf' to 'Nandor'. It seems Tolkien wanted him to at once be higher and lower than Túrin: high because of his race but low in his behaviour. Another character fulfilling a similar function is *Beowulf's* Unferth. A councillor of King

³⁴ Tolkien, *Shaping*, p. 28.

³⁵ Tolkien, *Shaping*, p. 123.

³⁶ Tolkien, *Road*, p. 354.

³⁷ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 237.

³⁸ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 237.

Hrothgar, he taunts Beowulf for losing a swimming competition with his friend Breca.³⁹

Originally it is Orgof who is poorly dressed, then Túrin: Orgof/Saeros evolves from wretch to snob. In the final version Saeros is sorely punished with his humiliating end. It seems that Tolkien somehow wanted a character that could embody all that was negative about the Elves that he otherwise celebrated, and the solution was to make this character a Dark-elf. The Nandor, then, are still technically Dark-elves, but they are not described as evil. They are in fact not described very much at all, and only mentioned as the people who later became the Green-elves of Ossiriand (Laiquendi) and the Silvan Elves of Mirkwood. Here follows a more in-depth account of what is said about the Nandor.

vi. Green-elves

In the 'Earliest Annals of Valinor' (1930-1) we get this description of the origin of the Green-elves:

Here the Green-elves or Laiqi or Laiqeldar came to Ossiriand and at length after many wanderings and long sojourns in diverse places. It is told that a company of the Noldoli under Dan forsake the host of Finwë early in the march and turned south but again finding the lands barren and dark turned north, and they came about 2700 over Eredlindon under Denithor son of Dan, and dwelt in Ossiriand, and they were allies of Thingol.⁴⁰

In the 'Grey Annals' (1951-2), the Green-elves are said to have forsaken the host of Olwë, and they would therefore be Teleri, not Noldor.⁴¹ Dan was changed to Lenwë and Denithor to Denethor in the 1959-60 'Quendi and Eldar'. In all sources prior to *The Silmarillion*, Nandor is given as a synonym of Green-elves, but in the index to this text Christopher Tolkien mentions the Silvan Elves of Mirkwood as Nandor.⁴² Although it is said that '[l]ittle is known of the wanderings of the Nandor',⁴³ we do learn that the Green-elves are so named

³⁹ Heaney, trans., 'Beowulf', ll.499-606.

⁴⁰ Tolkien, *Shaping*, pp. 270-71.

⁴¹ Tolkien, *Jewels*, p. 13.

⁴² Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 421.

⁴³ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 103.

because of the colour of their clothing,⁴⁴ and that they are troubled by the coming of Men, who are described as originating in Ossiriand.⁴⁵ It is also said that the armies of the sons of Fëanor mingled with the Green-elves.⁴⁶

vii. *Beren and Barahir*

In the 'Later Annals of Beleriand' it says that the Green-elves 'took no king after the death of Denithor, until Beren came among them.'⁴⁷ Beren and Lúthien lived on the island of Tol Galen in Ossiriand. At this point (1930-7) Beren was a Man, grandson of Bëor, but originally Barahir and Beren were Ilkorin Elves. Barahir is first mentioned in 'The Book of Lost Tales' (1916-9) under the name Egnor, and is said to be a commander of the host of Tareg the Ilkorin.⁴⁸ In 'Sketch of the Mythology' (1926-30) it is clearly stated that '[o]f Ilkorin race was Barahir and his son Beren'.⁴⁹ The first version of the story of Beren and Lúthien, 'The Tale of Tinúviel', was written in 1917, where Beren is mentioned as a Gnome (Noldor) and a 'wild Elf of the shadows'.⁵⁰ Tinwelint's (Thingol's) people are the Ilkorindi,⁵¹ while Gwendling (Melian) is 'a fay, a daughter of the Gods'.⁵² It is in this version Tinúviel's (Lúthien's) mother who makes her superior to Beren. The decision to make Beren mortal must have been decided by the fact that he dies like one. This decision is of vital importance for the relationship between Aragorn and Arwen in *The Lord of the Rings*, which is meant to parallel the love story of Beren and Lúthien. The identification of Beren as a Dark-elf makes their union inappropriate, but how so is only understood if the reader is fully aware of what Tolkien means by Dark-elf. The bands of roving Dark-elves present in his early writing

⁴⁴ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 106.

⁴⁵ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 165 and p. 162.

⁴⁶ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 231.

⁴⁷ Tolkien, *Road*, p. 142.

⁴⁸ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The History of Middle-earth: I. The Book of Lost Tales, part I* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), p. 240.

⁴⁹ Tolkien, *Shaping*, p. 23.

⁵⁰ Tolkien, *Lost Tales II*, p. 13.

⁵¹ Tolkien, *Lost Tales II*, p. 9.

⁵² Tolkien, *Lost Tales II*, p. 10.

diminish in significance as the mythology develops and the transformation of Beren to a Man is partly for the reason that Dark-elves of this demeanour simply do not feature in the story any more. The Elves that Tolkien ended up with were undoubtedly noble, independent of tribal affiliation, which puts the Dark-elves on *The Silmarillion* in an uncertain position. Are we meant to believe that there are still roving Dark-elves in Middle-earth even though they have been edited out of the narrative? The perception that is communicated to the reader is that Elves are noble and good, while most of the helpful Elves in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are Dark-elves. As Tolkien seem to have decided not to use the roving Dark-elves, the class difference between Beren and Lúthien had to be made clear by making Beren a Man; throughout the development of Tolkien's writing humans are lower than Elves.

viii. Dark-elves and language

There is another connection between Men and Dark-elves which appears in the story of the origin of Men. The first mention of Dark-elves in all of Tolkien's writing is in the awakening of the newly created sleeping Men. This is in 'Gilfanon's Tale', the final chapter of the first part of 'The Book of Lost Tales' (1916-9). Here a certain Nuin appears for the only time, and is mentioned as the Dark-elf who first discovers the sleeping Men. He awakens the first man and woman, named Ermon and Elmir, and teaches them speech and 'many things else'.⁵³

Nuin is said to have remained for some time with the group of Men and was by them known as the 'Father of Speech', a role in part taken up by Finrod Felagund in *The Silmarillion*. This story, originating in drafts from 1951, is that Finrod stumbles across the newly-awakened Men in Ossiriand. They have already learnt speech and music from unnamed Dark-elves. He plays his harp and sings for them and they believe that he is a god and call him Nóm, Wisdom, and his people (the Noldor) Nómin, The Wise.⁵⁴ Although the Nuin-story only appears in 'Gilfanon's Tale', the fact that Men already know language before they encounter

⁵³ Tolkien, *Lost Tales I*, p. 237.

⁵⁴ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, pp. 162-63, Tolkien, *Jewels*, p. 216.

Finrod shows that the story is not entirely lost in the later writing, only untold: it is stated in several places that Men encounter Dark-elves and become friendly with them.⁵⁵ In 'Gilfanon's Tale' it is said that Nuin taught Men 'much of the Ilkorin tongue':⁵⁶ this means that Nuin was not an Avari (the earlier Lembi), but a Teleri of Beleriand. The language he or other unnamed Dark-elves are supposed to have taught Men is called Taliska. In the 'Lhammas' it is said that

the language of these folk was greatly influenced by that of the Green-elves, and it was of old named *Taliska*, and this tongue was known still to Tuor, son of Huor, son of Gumlin, son of Hádor, and it was in part recorded by the wise men of Gondolin, where Tuor for a while abode.⁵⁷

In the 'Later Annals of Beleriand' and the 1937 'Quenta Silmarillion' it is said that Tuor was raised by Dark-elves after the death of his mother, and would therefore know their language.⁵⁸ In *The Silmarillion*, his fosterers are described as 'Grey-elves of Mithrim',⁵⁹ in which case the language would be common Sindarin rather than a long-lost language of Dark-elves. In conjunction with the claim that Men learnt speech from Dark-elves is a mention that they never went to Valinor and knew of the Valar only 'as a rumour and a distant name'.⁶⁰ This phrasing survived from 'Qenta Noldorinwa' (1930) to *The Silmarillion*. It is also said that these Dark-elves were wanderers, making them less 'civilised' than their kin in Doriath.

ix. Dark-elves and Orcs

The identity of Dark-elves seems never to have been definitively decided on. In most places Tolkien identifies them simply as the Elves who did not go to Aman in the time of the Two Trees, or had ancestors who have done so. There are, however, places where Dark-elves are

⁵⁵ Tolkien, *Shaping*, p. 4 and p. 20; Tolkien, *Road*, p. 195; Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 116 and p. 163.

⁵⁶ Tolkien, *Lost Tales I*, p. 236.

⁵⁷ Tolkien, *Road*, p. 195.

⁵⁸ Tolkien, *Road*, p. 51 and p. 348.

⁵⁹ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 235.

⁶⁰ Tolkien, *Shaping*, p. 99; Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 116.

described as entirely evil. One early mention is on the first 'Silmarillion' map of c.1926, where it is written that '[h]ere lie the Great Lands of the East were Ilkorins (dark-elves) and Wild Men live, acknowledging Morgoth as God and King.'⁶¹ This statement is never used again, although there are several descriptions of wandering Dark-elves as the origin of Orcs:

And among them were Orcs, who afterwards wrought ruin in Beleriand: but they were yet few and wary, and did but smell out the way of the land, awaiting the return of their lord. Whence they came, or what they were, the Elves knew not then, thinking them perhaps to be Avari who had become evil and savage in the wild; in which they guessed all too near, it was said.⁶²

All those of the Quendi who came into the hands of Melkor, ere Utumno was broken, were put in prison, and by slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved; and thus did Melkor breed the hideous race of the Orcs in envy and mockery of the Elves, of whom they were the bitterest foes....This it may be was the vilest deed of Melkor, and the most hateful to Ilúvatar.⁶³

Melkor creates the Orcs because of his hate against the Elves and their power: this is the version we get in *The Silmarillion*. It is also said there that the newly created Elves were spied upon by Melkor's agents, and those who strayed from their group often were taken by evil powers and never returned.⁶⁴ This might be another clue to where Orcs come from. The creation of the Orcs is never described in any detail: in the 'Earliest Annals of Beleriand' (1930) it says that 'he [Morgoth/Melkor] devises the Balrogs and the Orcs';⁶⁵ in the 'Later Annals of Beleriand' (1930-7) he 'brought forth Orcs and Balrogs'.⁶⁶ Yet in the 'Earliest' and 'Later Annals of Valinor' (1930-7), it is written that he 'bred and gathered once more his evil servants, Orcs and Balrogs'.⁶⁷ In 'Qenta Noldorinwa' (1930), conversely, Orcs are said to be made of stone.⁶⁸ Note the reference to breeding: in *The Silmarillion* it is said that 'the Orcs

⁶¹ Tolkien, *Shaping*, p. 235.

⁶² Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 102.

⁶³ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 47.

⁶⁴ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 48.

⁶⁵ Tolkien, *Shaping*, p. 295.

⁶⁶ Tolkien, *Road*, p. 138.

⁶⁷ Tolkien, *Shaping*, p. 266; Tolkien, *Road*, p. 126.

⁶⁸ Tolkien, *Shaping*, p. 82.

had life and multiplied after the manner of the Children of Ilúvatar'.⁶⁹ Tolkien seems to mean that if an Elf turns evil, he or she also irreversibly changes his or her physical body and that of his or her offspring. This connection between inner qualities and physical manifestation is seen also in the Dark-elves: none of them are described as being blonde or red-haired, for example. The darkness implied by the epithet Dark-elf pervades both appearance and personality: it is clear that Tolkien used ethnicity to describe his characters. Had he made every Elf individually different, there would be no support for identifying the tribes as consisting of Elves with the same demeanour, i.e. Vanyar - Fair Elves, Noldor - Deep Elves, and so on, and this would hinder the emphasis on group belonging. The fact that he used the term Dark-elves to suggest negative connotations serves as an explanation of how the elevated race of the Elves could become the wretched Orcs and forget all about their previous life and their kin. It is implied that by failing to obey the will of the Valar, the Dark-elves condemn themselves to a dangerous road further into darkness and the lure of Morgoth/Melkor's evil powers.

In the Eldar Tolkien assembled features from a variety of sources to create a quite original being that fulfilled the role that he imagined a supernatural Other. While possessing enough human-like qualities to be comfortably identified as one of the 'Three Kindreds', the Eldar are also set higher in the Middle-earthly hierarchy than Men and Dwarves. Tolkien interprets earlier elves as mostly good, although potentially dangerous, as we know from his non-fiction writings, 'On Fairy-stories', the essay accompanying the children's story *Smith of Wootton Major*, as well as many letters. His impact on the popular image of the elf has been paramount, so much so that many modern Fantasy writers adopt the 'Tolkienian' elf in order to conform to conventions inadvertently created by Tolkien, while others make a point of breaking them. The final section of the thesis will examine how the contemporary elf-figure

⁶⁹ Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, p. 47.

appears in Fantasy fiction in different mediums, and assess how Tolkien's writing has influenced its development.

Section III
Modern Fictions, Modern Beliefs

Chapter 10: The Anglicisation of Faerie

i. Tolkien's view on fairies

Tolkien's preference for *elf* over *fairy* was not firmly decided on at the time of the publication of *The Hobbit*, which contains one reference to Faerie as an alternative name for Aman.¹ The Elves of *The Hobbit* also retain some of the features of fairies in English, Celtic and French traditions, such as their love of hunting and dancing. In the time that elapsed between the publication of *The Hobbit* and the completion of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien's Elves had become more original, fictional beings than their forbears in folklore and legend: they were no longer fairies, as the word would have been interpreted in that time and place, yet the idea of fairies and Faerie, particularly of the kind featured in *Sir Orfeo*, still appealed to Tolkien, and he later used this in *Smith of Wootton Major*. Because Tolkien's meaning of *elf* was specific to his own writing, he doubted that it was the correct word to use:

Also I now deeply regret having used Elves, though this is a word in ancestry and original meaning suitable enough.²

He considered that the word had been subject to 'debasement' by its later (post-medieval) use, and was by his own time the name of a diminutive being, much like *fairy*.³ Tolkien's use of *elf* has changed this perception to some degree: readers of Tolkien and post-Tolkienian fantasy may now consider *elf* to be the proper name for a supernatural being of human proportions. The only listing of Tolkien's particular meaning of *elf* in the *OED* is the attribute *elf-friend*, applied to Elrond in *The Hobbit*, and *elven*, appropriated by Tolkien for properties of Elves: the meaning of *elf* as a Significant Other as it appears in Tolkien's writing and later

¹ Tolkien, *Hobbit*, p. 156.

² Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 185 (letter 151 to Hugh Brogan, 1954).

³ Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 185 (letter 151 to Hugh Brogan, 1954).

Fantasy fictions is then not defined by the *OED*.⁴ As outlined in particular in chapter 1, Tolkien had grounds to consider *elf* to be a human-sized being, despite the general characterisation in the *OED* of elves as small. He notes in 'On Fairy-stories' that

Fairy, as a noun more or less equivalent to *elf*, is a relatively modern word, hardly used until the Tudor period.⁵

The use of *fairy* that Tolkien is rejecting is certainly not that of French Arthurian tradition, but rather the later application to a diminutive being: not, then, the word itself, but the popular meaning of it. Tolkien considers *Faerie* to be the place where fairy tales are set: it is not the realm of the fairies per se, but of *fée*, enchantment. While fairy tales are set wholly in *Faerie*, being then a completely fantastic world, the texts discussed in this chapter identify *Faerie* as a secondary, fantastic world to a primary, real one. *Faerie* can be reached from the everyday, mundane world by a Chosen One, while elves, in the post-Tolkienian sense, tend to inhabit completely fantastic worlds in the style of Middle-earth.⁶ While the worlds of the Middle-earthly tradition, that may or may not be inhabited by elves, usually come with a map, Tolkien considers *Faerie* to defy any attempt at mapping, organising, or making sense of it:

I will not attempt to define that, nor to describe it directly. It cannot be done. *Faerie* cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible.⁷

ii. *Fantastic England*

⁴ *OED* sub 'elf', n.¹ 6. and 'elven', 2. See also Peter Gilliver, Jeremy Marshall and Edmund Weiner, *The Ring of Words: Tolkien and the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 114-16.

⁵ Tolkien, 'On Fairy-stories', p. 14.

⁶ I will immediately mention some exceptions where *elf* is used when *fairy* should be the 'proper' name according to this suggestion, and others previously outlined: Roger Zelazny's *Amber Chronicles* begins in a primary, real world, and also makes reference to the Arthurian tradition, but the characters are elves; Terry Pratchett's *Lords and Ladies* is partly a pastiche of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and also uses Irish and British folklore, yet the people of the title are elves; the film *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* uses names and characters from Irish mythology, yet they are elves, not fairies. These texts are in some ways the opposite of the ones discussed in this chapter, as the former are clearly using the elf-character already established by Tolkien, while the latter champion *fairy* as the correct word for the human-sized character of English tradition.

⁷ Tolkien, 'On Fairy-stories', p. 16.

The first condition for the Anglicisation of Faerie is that the realm is a secondary, fantastic world, to a primary, rational, *English* one. While the setting of two of the texts discussed in this chapter, Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* and Neil Gaiman's *Stardust*, is specified as England in the early and middle nineteenth century respectively, Hope Mirrlees' *Lud-in-the-Mist* and Tolkien's *Smith of Wootton Major* are less clearly temporally located, and the setting of England not specified within the text. Tolkien comments in the essay accompanying *Smith of Wootton Major* that

It is cast in an imaginary (but English) country-side, before the advent of power-machinery, but in a time when a prosperous community, mainly of craftsmen with an agricultural environment, could be aware of and afford luxuries such as sugar and spices.⁸

The unspecified, yet idyllic temporal location may not be a fantastic element in itself, but points to a concept of an ideal, pre-industrial England. The second condition for the Anglicisation of Faerie is that fairies are considered to be English: this causes a problem if the primary world is pre-industrial, and the *fairy* is considered to be the proper word in English, if Tolkien is correct in his view that the word was hardly in use before the Tudor period. All the texts discussed in this chapter are looking to the past with sentimentality for an England that never existed: in this respect, even the primary world of England is a fantastic one. By the time these texts were written, the word *fairy* had overtaken *elf* as the proper (and general) name for a supernatural being in the English language to the point where *elf* is usually considered to be the name of a being in Scandinavian or Scottish folklore, and not the correct word to use in England.⁹ Bearing in mind that *fairy* is only a modernised spelling of *Faerie*, referring to a realm, not a being, it seems likely that British, or rather English, Imperialism reached far outside the limits of the known world, and that the word was imported into the English language as booty from France during the Hundred Years War,

⁸ Tolkien, 'Smith of Wootton Major' essay, p. 84.

⁹ See for example Briggs, *Dictionary of Fairies* sub 'elves'. This notion is also presented in Borges, *The Book of Imaginary Beings* sub 'Elves'.

and may have been anglicised to avoid the use of Celtic names for the Otherworld. The third condition for the Anglicisation of Faerie is to avoid any reference to Imperialism, slavery, and Celticism. The primary, *fantastic* England must be seen as real to be able to gain access to the secondary world of Faerie, which may be more real than England itself.

iii. Smith of Wootton Major

Tolkien's decision to use the word *elf* was not yet made at the time when he began writing about the mythology of Middle-earth: *fairy* is used as an alternative word for *elf* in *The Book of Lost Tales*, both designating the Eldar. *The Book of Lost Tales* (1916-19) can be perceived as a forerunner to Tolkien's late story *Smith of Wootton Major* (1966), in which he returns to a view of fairies that is more inspired by fairy tales. *The Book of Lost Tales* features the protagonist Eriol, also known as Ælfwine of England, a mariner who travels to Tol Eressëa, the island of the elves/fairies, where he is told the stories that are later known as *The Silmarillion*. Christopher Tolkien considers his father's main objective for creating this mythology to have been 'to satisfy his desire for a specifically and recognizably *English* literature of "faerie"'.¹⁰ The Eriol/Ælfwine framework eventually disappeared from the mythology, and the Elves of Middle-earth developed further away from their fairy tale incarnation: Middle-earth had become a completely fantastic world with no reference left to England or any other real place. For *Smith of Wootton Major*, his last finished text, Tolkien returned to this early perception of fairies. Faery, the anglicised spelling that Tolkien prefers, is a perilous realm, yet the fairies are in large part benevolent. While the near-divine Queen has similarities with Galadriel, the fact that she is unnamed and also appears as a dancing maiden links her to folklore, the latter also indicating that she can change her appearance. So can the King, who is also known to the people of Wootton Major as Alf or Prentice, being the village cook. It should be noted that Tolkien's fairies are not anatomically different from his

¹⁰ Christopher Tolkien in Tolkien, *Lost Tales I*, p. 22 (original emphasis).

Elves: the difference would instead be in their social context, so to speak. The description of the fairy host encountered by Smith will serve as an example:

The elven mariners were tall and terrible; their swords shone and their spears glinted and a piercing light was in their eyes. Suddenly they lifted up their voices in a song of triumph, and his hear was shaken with fear, and he fell upon his face, and they passed over him and went away into the echoing hills.¹¹

This is comparable with the fairies in Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, discussed below. This is the description from that text of one of the soldiers of a host that arrived in Britain in 1110:

His skin was very pale (it shone like moonlight) and entirely without blemish. His hair was long and straight like a fall of dark brown water. The bones of his face were unnaturally fine and strong. The expression of the face was solemn. His blue eyes were long and slanting and his brows were as fine and dark as pen-strokes with a curious flourish at the end.¹²

Clarke is then quite in agreement with Tolkien about the appearance of fairies, although the description parallels more closely that of Poul Anderson's elves in *The Broken Sword*:

Strange were these tall warriors, moving like rippling water with never a sound of footfall, but byrnies chiming silvery through the night. White and ageless, of thin-carved, high-boned features, with beast ears and eyes of blind mystery, they were a sight of terror to the mortal gaze.¹³

This standardised view is not Tolkien's invention: the Eldar do not have slanted eyes or arched eyebrows, and the pointed ears are debateable. The consensual image of the elf-character in modern fantasy is then a combination of elements from books, films, comics, art, role-playing games, as well as folklore. Tolkien introduced the beardless males, hardly ever found elsewhere, while the aversion to iron is imported from folklore.

Wootton Major is in England insofar as it represents a world that, despite being pastoral to the point of being fantastic, also is mundane and familiar. It can be visited by

¹¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *Smith of Wootton Major*, ed. Verlyn Flieger (London: HarperCollins, 2005), p. 26. Note that properties of fairies are still elven, in Tolkien's own meaning of the word.

¹² Susanna Clarke, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 638.

¹³ Anderson, *The Broken Sword*, p. 82.

Smith for a time, when he is favoured by the King and Queen, but must ultimately give up the fairy star that grants him entry. Humans, after all, do not belong in Faery, while they do belong in Middle-earth, in Tolkien's meaning. In 'On Fairy-stories', Tolkien prefers the word Enchantment over Magic to describe elvish craft, and suggests that

Enchantment produces a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside; but in its purity it is artistic in desire and purpose.¹⁴

He considers Magic to be the forceful manipulation of the world, while Enchantment is what elves *are*, and what human Fantasy aspires to. Fairies, then, are not the rulers of Faerie; they *are* Faerie, personifications of the power that produces the fantastic world. In this respect Faerie can be any fantastic world that is adjacent to the mundane world, not necessarily England. With regards to the first two texts discussed in this chapter, Hope Mirrlees' *Lud-in-the-mist* (1926) and Tolkien's *Smith of Wootton Major* (1967), the writers as well as the presumed readers are English. This is somewhat changed in the more recent texts, Neil Gaiman's *Stardust* (1997)¹⁵ and Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* (2004). The Englishness is in these texts pointed out by naming certain historical characters that may be familiar to non-Britons, such as Queen Victoria, Charles Dickens and Samuel Morse in the first case, and George III, Lord Wellington and Lord Byron in the latter. *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* is clearly dated as taking place between 1806 and 1817, while *Stardust* begins around 1838, most events taking place in 1855. By this time, immigrants had started arriving in Britain, giving new faces to the image of the stranger, as will be explained below.

iv. Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell

Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* is set during the Napoleonic wars and deals with the two title characters' efforts to revive English magic. The book throughout

¹⁴ Tolkien, 'On Fairy-stories', p. 48.

¹⁵ Published first as a graphic novel, illustrated by Charles Vess, and novelised with some re-editing in 1999. The references will be to this later edition.

makes claims of authenticity, as the fictional writer has the viewpoint of someone living in the beginning of the nineteenth century and utilises the spellings of that time. Adding to this is the presence of over a hundred footnotes, many explaining events in the mythology of the world of the book, and these often give bibliographic citations to books, of which none exists outside the fictional world, some written by the characters themselves.¹⁶ This again brings up the issue of a bibliography of Faerie, following Spenser's '*Antiquitee of Faery lond*' (*sic*), which in *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* is represented by Mr Norrell's library at Hurtfew Abbey. The one book that is sought after is, however, not in Mr Norrell's possession, but discovered later, as will be discussed below. The title characters are practical magicians, as opposed to the theoretical ones existing in England at this time, and one of the conditions for performing practical magic is to be in league with the fairies. The rise to fame of Mr Norrell, the elder magician, begins with his resurrection of Emma Wintertowne, the fiancée of the Prime Minister, Sir Walter Pole. For this purpose Mr Norrell summons a fairy, known only as the gentleman with the thistle-down hair. He is described as

a tall, handsome person with pale, perfect skin and an immense amount of hair, as pale and shining as thistle-down. His cold, blue eyes glittered and he had long dark eye-brows, which terminated in an upward flourish. He was dressed exactly like any other gentleman, except that his coat was of the brightest green imaginable – the colour of leaves in early summer.¹⁷

The gentleman agrees to raise Miss Wintertowne, later Lady Pole, from the dead on the condition that he is given half her life. This Norrell takes this to mean that the gentleman will claim the lady after half her life span, but what the contract really entails is that she will be taken to the gentleman's own halls of Lost-hope and forced to dance every night. Mr Norrell is later approached by a street magician known as Vinculus, who has come to deliver the Raven King's prophecy to him:

¹⁶ The closest Clarke gets to a genuine reference is one to a poem about one of the Raven King's human servants, Thomas de Dundelle, which is supposed to have been written by Chrétien de Troyes (Clarke, *Strange*, p. 361n).

¹⁷ Clarke, *Strange*, p. 106.

The rain made a door for me and I went through it;
 The stones made a throne for me and I sat upon it;
 Three kingdoms were given to me to be mine forever;
 England was given to me to be mine forever.
 The nameless slave wore a silver crown;
 The nameless slave was a king in a strange country...¹⁸

The Raven King¹⁹ was a human fostered by the fairies, king Auberon and queen Titania even, and is in the world of the book the greatest of all English magicians, and leader of the fairy host. His story is unfolded mainly through the footnotes, although a section of his childhood is recounted in the short story 'The Ladies of Grace Adieu'.²⁰ The Raven King's human name was John Uskglass, although this is not treated as a proper name. His name in *Sidhe*, the word Clarke uses for the language spoken by the fairies, is pronounced several times in *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*, but is never registered by the human characters that hear it, and is therefore not transcribed. The fairies are not particularly impressed by either of the modern magicians: while Norrell is too bookish, Strange is too arrogant. The person who is favoured by the gentleman with the thistle-down hair is Sir Walter Pole's butler, Stephen Black, who was born on a slave-ship heading to England from Jamaica. The gentleman takes it upon himself to make Stephen king of England, whether he likes it or not, to fulfil the prophecy of the nameless slave spoken by Vinculus. The gentlemen already has the power to abduct Lady Pole to Faerie as he owns half her life, but Stephen Black demands persuasion. The gentleman's powers are limited in the Fantastic England of the text in a way that indicates that he should not be there and is only there because he is summoned by Mr Norrell, who is

¹⁸ Clarke, *Strange*, p. 153. The three kingdoms were, firstly, in the north of England, more specifically Cumberland, Northumberland, Durham, Yorkshire, Derbyshire and parts of Nottinghamshire, secondly, a part of Faerie, and thirdly, a country on the far side of Hell (p. 269n).

¹⁹ The name may be derived from Matthias Corvinus, king of Hungary (1443-1490). His library, the Bibliotheca Corviniana, was the second largest in Europe at the time. See Marcus Tanner, *The Raven King: Matthias Corvinus and the Fate of His Lost Library* (London: Yale University Press, 2008).

²⁰ Grace Adieu is the name of a village, like Lud-in-the-Mist and Wootton Major, perhaps used to make reference to these other texts.

unaware of his character. The way of the gentleman is deceit, while he presents himself as a fairy noble who invites Chosen Ones to the glorious Faerie, which all turns out to be a facade.

When summoned by Mr Norrell, the gentleman with the thistle-down hair professes to have been the servant of the Raven King as well as many other famous magicians, telling Mr Norrell, 'We both know who *I* am'. This is not, however, apparent to the reader. The gentleman would pass himself off as a significant individual in the fairy community, and even claims to have been ruler of London at one time, but, judging from his characterisation in the text, this is most likely hot air. There is one episode mentioned in a footnote that may reveal more about the gentleman's identity. In the early fourteenth century, a third-rate magician called Simon Bloodworth summoned a fairy known as Buckler to act as his servant. Bloodworth failed to quiz Buckler about his true identity, and the story ended with his whole family being swept off to Faerie to work as slaves in the household of a prince called John Hollyshoes. Buckler's physical appearance changes drastically when he comes in the service of Bloodworth:

His dusty rags became a suit of good clothes; a rusty pair of scissars (*sic*) that he had stolen from a locksmith in the town became a sword; his thin, piebald fox-face became a pale and handsome human one; and he grew very suddenly two or three feet taller. This, he was quick to impress on Mrs Bloodworth and her daughters, was his true appearance – the other merely being an enchantment he had been under.²¹

The true appearance of the gentleman with the thistle-down hair is revealed in his final moments in life:

The gentleman's hair streamed out like silver snakes in the dark water. His face was a terrible sight. In his fury and hatred he began to lose any resemblance to humankind: his eyes grew further apart, there was fur upon his face and his lips rolled back from his teeth in a snarl.²²

It seems reasonable to believe that the gentleman may have been known as Buckler and/or John Hollyshoes, but this still does not reveal his true identity. His character does not match

²¹ Clarke, *Strange*, p. 73.

²² Clarke, *Strange*, p. 983.

that of Auberon in *The Ladies of Grace Adieu*, nor is it likely that the gentleman is a White Lord-character like Gwyn ap Nudd, although he may want to pass himself off as one of this sort. The name Buckler suggests Puck, but this name alludes to *buck*, a male goat, rather than a fox, although the case might be supported by the general behaviour of the gentleman, which identifies him as a trickster-character. It is likely that the gentleman is an original invention of Clarke, like the Raven King, and that she uses bibliographic references to anchor the characters in a fictional mythology, although many 'truths' are unknown even for the fictional writer.

Several of the central characters, the Raven King, Vinculus, and the gentleman with the thistle-down hair, are never given proper names, the last not even a capital initial. This should be related to the theme of true names in the narrative: the gentleman tries to convince Stephen Black to be king by offering to tell him his true name that his mother whispered before she died in childbirth, while Vinculus is married several times over, having given each of his wives different names and life stories. Clarke does offer a collection of names of fairies, mainly referring to the servants summoned by the magicians of the past. At least two of the names mentioned are found in British folklore: Dick-come-Tuesday, who served Thomas Godbless, is mentioned by Denham as Dick-a-Tuesdays, probably a name for a collective spirit,²³ and Coleman Gray, servant of the Cornish magician Meraud, is described by Katharine Briggs as a pisky (*sic*) boy adopted by humans.²⁴ Another possible fairy name is Teilo, commemorated in *Teilo's Hand*, a spell that stops anything. The writer presumes it was named after the fairy who first taught it to an English magician. Teilo was the name of a sixth-century Welsh saint, and is not found elsewhere.²⁵ Common fairy names in English

²³ Michael Aislabie Denham, *The Denham Tracts*, vol. II, ed. James Hardy (London: David Nutt, 1895), pp. 77-78.

²⁴ Briggs, *Dictionary of Fairies* sub 'Coleman Gray'.

²⁵ Clarke, *Strange*, p. 888n. For St Teilo, see G. H. Doble, *Lives of the Welsh Saints* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1971), pp. 162-206.

folklore are usually of the type featured in Jabez Allie's list of fairies, lifted from *The Life of Robin Goodfellow*, a reprint of the 1628 pamphlet *Robin Goodfellow, his mad Pranks and Merry Jests*, and from Drayton's *Nymphidia*. Listed in the first are the fairies Pinch, Patch, Gull, Grim, Sib, Tib, Licke, and Lull, whilst Drayton names Mab's maids of honour as Fib, Tib, Pinch, Pin, Tick, Quick, Jil, Jin, Tit, Nit, Wap, and Win. Furthermore, Allie attempts to connect these names with place names in Worcestershire, considered to be of Anglo-Saxon origin, which he considers support that the fairy names are proper ones, of genuine Anglo-Saxon flower-fairies.²⁶ While Celtic 'fairies' tend to have personal names of the human kind,²⁷ those appearing in English folklore are usually known by nick-names, euphemisms, compound names, or combinations of these.²⁸ Clarke utilises in particular compound names, such as Hollyshoes, Starhouse, and Fallowthought, in order to point out the Englishness of the fairies, since she uses similar names for the English characters.

Englishness in *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* also conveyed by the style of the language: the fictional writer uses the spelling of the early nineteenth-century: 'shew' instead of 'show', 'scissars', not 'scissors', 'Hanover-square', not 'Hanover Square'. The language is also appropriately formal to be used about gentlemen, presumably by a gentleman writer. Norrell, Strange, and their equals are gentlemen, so is the unnamed fairy. However, the only person the gentleman with the thistle-down hair approves of is the butler Stephen Black, while the Raven King only appears to Vinculus and Mr Norrell's servant Childermass, none

²⁶ Briggs, *Dictionary of Fairies* sub 'Allie's list of the fairies'. See also Briggs's discussion of these names in *The Anatomy of Puck*, p. 59.

²⁷ With this I refer to the Gentry-type. The most common type of name is personal name followed by a patronymic, e.g. Gwyn ap Nudd, Fionn Mac Cumhal. Some epithets appear as surnames, possibly when the father is unknown or irrelevant, e.g. Nuada of the Silver Arm, Nudd the Generous, while some deities were known only by epithets such as the Dagda ('Good God') or the Morrigan ('Great Queen'). This changes after the medieval period so that leprechauns, for example, are not addressed by their name, or their name is taboo or unknown, following the English pattern.

²⁸ These are the kinds of names that Tolkien adopted for his Hobbits, e.g. Baggins, Took, Grubb, Chubb, Brandybuck and, Proudfoot, to point to their 'Englishness'. In this respect Hobbits represent a sort of supernatural being that in English folklore may be called elf or fairy, in the sense of a small, endearing creature, which Tolkien probably did not fit with his perception of elves, yet which pointed to an idea of Englishness that he did agree with. See Tolkien, *Letters*, pp. 31 (letter 25 to the editor of the 'Observer', 1938), p. 196 (letter 154 to Naomi Mitchison, 1954), and p. 250 (letter 190 to Rayner Unwin, 1956).

considered to be gentlemen. It seems the fairies wish to be in company that enforces their superiority, or prefer to reward those who deserve it by their actions. To describe the fairy as a gentleman provides him with a position equal to that of the title characters (whom he thoroughly disapproves of), but his appearance and manners says nothing of his nature. The *OED* lists 'old gentleman' as a name for the devil, although the gentleman with the thistle-down hair is hardly important enough to be Auberon.²⁹ The term *gentry* is of Anglo-Irish origin and further explained in Chapter 2 above.³⁰ Clarke has no problem with describing words like *brugh*, for the underground dwellings of fairies, as being in the language of the fairies, called *Sidhe*: both words are Irish.³¹ The Raven King is an original creation of Clarke's, while the usual name for the righteous supernatural king of Britain is Arthur, who is not mentioned at all.³² The figurehead of Englishness, in the sense of the civilised land, not the geographical, is Lord Wellington, whom the fictional writer calls 'Englishness carried to perfection'³³ whilst in the footnote, the writer admits that 'Of course it may be objected that Wellington himself was *Irish*, but a patriotic English pen does not stoop (*sic*) to answer such quibbling.'³⁴

England, as it is referred to by the human characters, is not a geographic term, but rather one that refers to a certain type of formal presentation. England has breeding, manners, the correct pronunciation, and unavoidably, class differences. I will refer to this interpretation as *Formal England*. It is called by Mr Norrell's servant Lucas 'a natural place', meaning a place that is not magic, or one that obeys the human concept of what is natural.³⁵ That which

²⁹ *OED sub* 'Gentleman', 5.a. This meaning is also used by Terry Pratchett in *Lords and Ladies*, discussed in chapter 12.

³⁰ *OED sub* 'Gentry', 3.b.

³¹ Dinneen *sub* 'brugh' and 'síod'.

³² Denham, pp. 125-31. Merlin is described once by Clarke as having been a British magician, but not English (Clarke, *Strange*, p. 282n).

³³ Clarke, *Strange*, p. 373.

³⁴ Clarke, *Strange*, p. 373n.

³⁵ Clarke, *Strange*, p. 929.

is not included in this classification I will label *Wild England*. This concept refers to the physical land that is subject to the magic of the fairies. The northern part of England is still under the authority of the Raven King, while the gentleman with the thistle-down hair seems to be able to perform magic anywhere, even outside England. Wild England is, like the fairies, less predictable. It lacks the rules and orderly behaviour that would make it acceptable as natural for the English characters. The ballad 'The Raven King' indicates that Formal England is in fact only a thin membrane over a wild and magical realm:

This land is all too shallow
It is painted on the sky
And trembles like the wind-shook rain
When the Raven King goes by[.]³⁶

The fairies, then, are the physical manifestation of English magic, and the condition for practical magic to be performed. As Strange says, 'Fairies are the source of everything we magicians desire. Magic is their native condition!'³⁷ The fairies are the kinds of English magic that can be approached, because they can assume human-like forms. Clarke presents the opinion that the human-like appearance is glamour, and their true form is more feral and creature-like. This is a view common in the folklore of Britain and Ireland, particularly in legends like 'The Fairies' Midwife' and 'The Fairy Widower'.³⁸ Clarke chose perhaps the most formal period of English history as the setting, this also being the time when fairies are typically small: the human-sized rendition present in Clarke's texts should then be perceived as creative anachronism. The fairies, then, are magical, but not the actual source of the magic; they are only symptoms of something much greater. The source is instead the mad and unruly Wild England: magic is contained in the actual land, the earth, sky, water and trees of

³⁶ Clarke, *Strange*, p. 36n. The ballad treats the abduction of a boy by the Raven King, a reoccurring theme of narratives of the king of the elves or fairies, and is particularly reminiscent of Goethe's *Erkönig*.

³⁷ Clarke, *Strange*, p. 706.

³⁸ Briggs, *Dictionary of Fairies* sub 'Fairy Widower, The' and 'Midwife to the fairies'.

England, whereas the fairies can be seen as *wights* of that land. Clarke considers this magic to still be present in the real world:

England can still seem a pretty magical place to me. Sometimes a feature of a landscape - a line of trees in a field; a perfectly ordinary house on a hill - can have the eeriest effect upon you that you can't quite explain.³⁹

The magic that actually takes place, or more properly, is allowed by the Raven King to take place, is that which further enforces his domination over his earthly realm in England.

The prophecy that Vinculus speaks to Mr Norrell is from a book, in fact *the Book of Magic*, written by the Raven King himself, and stolen by Vinculus's father Clegg from a farmer called Robert Findhelm.⁴⁰ Clegg then proceeded to eat the book, page by page, during a drinking contest in Newcastle; consequently Vinculus was born with the letters of the book inscribed on his body. He has never been able to read them himself, but says

I am a Book...I am *the* Book. It is the task of the Book to bear the words. Which I do. It is the task of the Reader to know what they say.⁴¹

Vinculus says that he has had a Reader in the past, who has now died, and Childermass is selected as the new Reader. Vinculus and Childermass are the only two characters in the book who are confronted with the Raven King in the flesh, both having pledged their allegiance to him. Vinculus is hanged by the gentleman with the thistle-down hair, but brought back to life by the Raven King, who in the process changes the writings on his body. From that, and other events, it can be concluded that the gentleman with the thistle-down hair is the enemy of the Raven King, hardly his foster-father Auberon or friend Puck. He then remains an original creation, all the while the Clarke indicates that he should be known from earlier literature and folklore, making creative use of the readers' possible preconceptions of fairies from these sources. The reuse of previously found fairy names and characters connects the text to

³⁹ Clarke in *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* Reader's Guide, accessed from <<http://www.jonathanstrange.com/copy.asp?s=2&id=18>>, 9 March 2006.

⁴⁰ Clarke, *Strange*, pp. 394-401.

⁴¹ Clarke, *Strange*, p. 995.

literature (Shakespeare in particular) and local legends. Clarke's sequel to *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* is a collection of short stories that are set in the same world and connects her fairies with significantly English fairy tales and legends.

v. *The Ladies of Grace Adieu*

Clarke further develops the concept of a bibliography of Faerie in the collection *The Ladies of Grace Adieu and Other Stories*. This volume does have some footnotes, but more interestingly also an introduction by a 'Professor James Sutherland, director of *Sidhe* Studies, University of Aberdeen'. According to Dr Ian Russell, director of the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen, no such person works or has worked there, and there are no references to *Sidhe* studies since 1918.⁴² 'Professor Sutherland' is an invention of Clarke's, and lives within the fictional world where the events in *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* actually happened. 'Sutherland' claims that the volume is collected from earlier manuscripts, and has been gathered (he does not say by whom), in order to

introduce the reader to some of the ways in which Faerie can impinge upon our quotidian world, in other words to create a sort of primer to Faerie and fairies.⁴³

The volume consists of stories that are combinations of two or more narratives featuring fairies. 'Mr Simonelli and the Fairy Widower' is a combination of the folk-tales 'The Fairy Widower' and 'The Fairies Midwife', and features the re-appearance of the John Hollyshoes mentioned in *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, being the Fairy Widower of the title. The story is told through the journals of the priest and general man of learning Alessandro Simonelli, who has been told that his father was Italian but goes out of his way to emphasise his own Englishness. On the day that he arrives in his new parish, he is summoned to tend to John Hollyshoes's wife during childbirth. Simonelli is struck by the squalid conditions that the couple live in, while Hollyshoes asks if he cannot see the grandeur of the hall, called Allhope

⁴² Ian Russell, e-mail reply, 25 June 2008.

⁴³ Susanna Clarke, *The Ladies of Grace Adieu and Other Stories* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 1.

Manor.⁴⁴ It becomes evident that Simonelli can see beyond the glamour, and Hollyshoes observes that they have some physical resemblance to each other. Apart from the difference in skin colour ('his as brown as beechmast, mine as white as hot-pressed paper'), they both had

the same long eye-brows like black pen-strokes terminating in an upward flourish; the same curious slant to the eye-lid which bestows the face with an expression of sleepy arrogance; the same little black mole just below the right eye.⁴⁵

It comes to light that Mr Simonelli is the son of John Hollyshoes's cousin, Thomas Fairwood, who seduced Simonelli's mother and left her, while she could only account for that he was 'a foreign gentleman'.⁴⁶ The physical description of Hollyshoes does not match that of the gentleman with the thistle-down hair, or that of Buckler, although the name of the manor is a case for this identification, as well as Hollyshoes's behaviour. He takes little notice of the fact that his wife dies during childbirth, but is more interested in Simonelli's presence. 'Mr Simonelli and the Fairy Widower' is as minutely dated as *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, as it is presented as entries from Simonelli's journal. The time elapsed is 11 August to 20 December 1811; there are no entries in *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* between March 1811 and January 1812, and therefore logically possible for the gentleman with the thistle-down hair to occupy himself with Mr Simonelli in the recess. The problem is that Hollyshoes is killed in the short story; he is sliced in two but the body taken away before Simonelli can examine it, and could well have been restored, as Simonelli does manage to note some differences between fairy and human anatomy:

it occurs to me that just as Reason is seated in the brain of Man, so we Fairies may contain within ourselves some *organ of Magic*.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Or to give it the name that it is known as by humans, End-Of-All-Hope House (cf. the gentleman with the thistle-down hair's halls, Lost-hope).

⁴⁵ Clarke, *Ladies*, p. 125.

⁴⁶ Clarke, *Ladies*, p. 137.

⁴⁷ Clarke, *Ladies*, p. 157 (original emphasis).

Simonelli is now referring to himself as a fairy: this is mainly for economic reasons, as he is penniless and hopes to inherit his father's estate in Faerie. He is also quite disgraced after his association with Hollyshoes, while 'Sutherland' remarks that his accounts must be handled with caution, as he 'displays the conceit and arrogance of his race. (I am talking here of the *English* and not of anyone else).'⁴⁸ The comment from 'Sutherland' is quite diplomatic, if we are meant to think that Simonelli is deplorable because he is the son of an Englishwoman rather than the son of a fairy. So how English is Simonelli? 'Sutherland' says that he published his journals first in the 1820s, and continued to publish them until the early twentieth century, re-edited according to his interests at the time. From this can be concluded that Simonelli did inherit his father's estate, and also some of his immortal genes, if he lived and thrived for over 130 years.⁴⁹ It can therefore be concluded that Mr Simonelli accepted his fairy-ness while he still continued to live in Clarke's Fantastic England and not in Faerie, presumably accepted by the humans in his surroundings because of his wealth and despite his un-Englishness.

vi. Stardust

Clarke's hyperbolic Englishness might be best viewed in the light of what audience it is directed to, which is an international readership and in particular American fantasy fans familiar with the writings of Neil Gaiman. Gaiman and Clarke agree enough on the appearance and nature of Faerie to enable Clarke to set her short story 'The Duke of Wellington Misplaces his Horse' in the village of Wall, the location of Gaiman's *Stardust*. Like Clarke, Gaiman must multi-task to appeal to both English and American readers, as well as those in other countries: the England presented is excessively quaint, to compensate for the lack of the feeling of familiarity that Tolkien's and Mirrlees' readers might have felt, to the point where both Clarke and Gaiman might be considered as parodying typically English

⁴⁸ Clarke, *Ladies*, p. 2 (original emphasis).

⁴⁹ An approximation; his age in the short story is never specified.

writers like Dickens and Austen. It is likely here that a modern fantasy fan might not have read *Smith of Wootton Major* or *Lud-in-the-mist*, in particular if they are American readers, while Gaiman is a familiar name to American fantasy fans, and can be seen as introducing elements of traditional English folklore and fairy tales to this audience in *Stardust*. Gaiman describes *Stardust* as a 'fairy tale for adults', and says that he endeavoured to write it less in the style of *The Lord of the Rings*, and more in the tradition of *Lud-in-the-Mist* and *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, and consequently also pretended to be writing in the 1920s.⁵⁰ While Clarke's England is formal, Gaiman's is more rustic. Unlike *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*, the Englishness in *Stardust* is used as a model of old-fashioned quaintness, rather than play upon national identity:

The voice sounded like the voice I needed – a little stilted and old-fashioned, the voice of a fairy tale. I wanted to write a story that would feel, to the reader, like something he or she had always known. Something familiar, even if the elements were as original as I could make them.⁵¹

England may be used as a primary world that borders to the secondary because of the level and speed of industrialisation that was very apparent at the time Mirrlees and Dunsany were writing, and which Tolkien was so appalled by. Fairies and elves can then be seen as beings of an archaic past, and in the case of the more potent, human-sized sort, a kind of environmental warriors, a theme that will be explored further in the next chapter. Gaiman's England is a mundane, everyday place:

The village was somewhere in England, and was called Wall, after the wall that runs beside it, a dull-looking wall in a normal-looking meadow. And on the other side of the wall was Faerie – Faerie as a place or as a quality, rather than a posh way of spelling fairy.⁵²

There is a gap in the wall that is constantly guarded, except for every nine years, on May Day, when humans are admitted into the meadow to attend the Faerie Market. This attraction

⁵⁰ Neil Gaiman, 'Happily Ever After', *The Guardian Review*, 13 October 2007, p. 14.

⁵¹ Gaiman, 'Happily Ever After'.

⁵² Gaiman, 'Happily Ever After'.

draws visitors from faraway lands, to whom the first protagonist Dunstan Thorne has this reaction:

Dunstan knew that it was rude to stare, and that, as a villager of Wall, he had every right to feel superior to all of the 'furriners.' But he could smell unfamiliar spices on the air, and hear men and women speaking to each other in a hundred tongues, and he gawked and gazed unashamedly.⁵³

Interestingly, Dunstan's judgment on the fairies is far more accepting: they, after all, belong in another world, not his own. Gaiman stresses the interpretation of Faerie as a realm or a quality, not as a kind of being, which leads to the question of what his Faerie is populated with. The closest one gets in *Stardust* to the human-sized fairies and of the kind found in Tolkien, Clarke and Anderson, is the Lord of Stormhold and his family. The Lord, who remains unnamed, has seven sons, named after Roman numerals (Primus, Secundus, and so on), and one daughter, Una, the mother of the hero, Tristran Thorne (his father being Dunstan Thorne). There are, however, not many 'elvish' features among them: they are subject to ageing and death (although the Lord dies at an exceedingly high age), the males have beard growth and there is nothing special about their appearance that would make them distinct from humans. The only one to show any otherworldly tendencies is Una, as it has to be apparent that she is not a human. For this reason, she has deep violet eyes and the ears of a cat, while her son, Tristran, inherits one somewhat pointed ear. The human-looking inhabitants of Gaiman's Faerie seem in fact quite as human as their neighbours in Wall, and are rather subjects to the magic in their world than controlling it, while those who do control it are witches, not fairies. Gaiman describes Faerie as the Otherworld that holds many different beings that might or might not look different from humans. The emphasis is on the difference of the world rather than the characters. Faerie is accessible from Wall under certain conditions to keep the humans safe from the exotic wildness that is Faerie, and

⁵³ Neil Gaiman, *Stardust* (London: Headline, 1999), p. 8.

Tristran is the only character who gets away with breaking them because he is the Chosen One as he is half-fairy and thus belongs in both worlds. To the rest of Gaiman's Fantastic England, Faerie is too wild and unknown and must be guarded and regulated.

vii. Lud-in-the-Mist

Like those of *Stardust*, the fairies in Hope Mirrlees' *Lud-in-the-Mist* must also be contained in their own realm to keep their human neighbours safe. Unlike Gaiman's fairies, they are not the beings of fairy tale, but in fact the dead. The 'Silent People' represent the constant vicinity of death, threatening to infringe upon the quaint lifestyle of the humans of the free state of Dorimare. According to the opinion of the Dorimarites, among the signs of the dangerous association with the people and things of Fairyland is strange behaviour, beginning with breeching the taboo of talking about this realm. The physical manifestation of this illegal association is the smuggling of fairy fruit, a hallucinogenic substance that can cause madness. The danger of consuming the fruit is in perspective lesser than the judgment of the Dorimarites upon those who do it; the community spirit is based on the taboo on eating the fruit and talking about fairy things in general. Dorimare is at the time the book is set ruled by middle-class merchants, but was in the past a much more poetic place, and closer to Fairyland. The embodiment of this transgressing impulse is the hedonistic aristocrat Duke Aubrey, once ruler of Dorimare who, increasingly unpopular with the rising merchant class disappeared and is believed to have passed over the border to Fairyland. Duke Aubrey is Mirrlees' adaptation of Auberon, referring in particular to his incarnation in *Huon de Bordeaux*, as his appearance is described as 'a hunchback, with a face of angelic beauty'.⁵⁴ Even after his disappearance, Duke Aubrey continues to play a part in local folklore, where he is sometimes the leader of the Wild Hunt, sometimes a prankster and seducer of women. In the second role he is rivaled by another character by name Willy Wisp, who with his 'ho,

⁵⁴ Hope Mirrlees, *Lud-in-the-Mist* [1926] (New York: Cold Spring Press, 2005), p. 21.

ho, *hoh*' can be readily identified as Robin Goodfellow, or Puck.⁵⁵ As 'Professor Wisp' he indulges in teaching ecstatic dancing to the young ladies at Miss Primrose Crabapple's Academy, accompanied by a strange old fiddler called Portunus. Dorimare is in the present day in effect run by the mayor of the capital Lud-in-the-Mist, the ardent disbeliever Nathaniel Chanticleer, who becomes compromised when his young son Ranulph ingests fairy fruit. Chanticleer must in the end venture into Fairyland to find a cure for Ranulph, but unlike Gaiman's account of this kind of quest, Chanticleer's experiences in Fairyland is never described: his errand is private and the change it brings with it is personal. Mirrlees' Fairyland cannot be described, as the realm of the dead is by nature indescribable, a sentiment that agrees with Tolkien in his comment above.

viii. Un-English Others

Lud-in-the-Mist is perhaps the best example of the England-Faerie dichotomy that Neil Gaiman describes as 'the balancing and twining of the mundane and the miraculous. We need both, after all.'⁵⁶ Colin Manlove sees the juxtaposition of order and chaos as typical for English fantasy:

Rules and patterns are of course native to traditional fairy-tales, but English fantasy makes particular and often elaborate use of them, to hold together its fecundity and exuberance.⁵⁷

All of the texts discussed in this chapter concern themselves with the interruption of the foreign in an otherwise mundane, yet idyllically homely world, yet there not all things foreign are the same: some of the villagers of Wall in *Stardust*, the innkeeper Mr Bromios, for example, are strangers who have settled and become part of the community; Stephen Black in *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* declines the offer by the gentleman with the thistle-down hair to make him a king in Africa since he considers himself English, and the offer is revised

⁵⁵ Willy Wisp is given as an alias to Robin Goodfellow in the tract. Collier, p. 21.

⁵⁶ Gaiman in Mirrlees, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Colin Manlove, *The Fantasy Literature of England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 196.

to instead make him king of England. The character most disinclined to deal with fairies and the Raven King in the same text, because of their un-Englishness, is Mr Lascelles, the bearer of a Norman name long since integrated into Englishness, while no comment is made about his name despite the prominence of the Napoleonic Wars in the narrative. All four texts also make reference to a multitude of exotic spices, that are not looked upon as outlandish (as the fairy fruit is in *Lud-in-the-Mist*), but add to the sense of richness and homeliness. What is accepted as English, as exemplified in these texts, is by no means absolute but rather arbitrary, the most pertinent case being that of *fairy*. The word is never considered to be un-English, yet the fairies themselves may be. *Smith of Wootton Major*, *Lud-in-the-Mist* and *Stardust* are all set in villages adjacent to Faerie, with the influence of the fairies, who transgress the boundaries for what the English characters see as natural, in this case meaning that which obey human rules, and thus pose a threat to the villagers' homely lifestyle. In all three texts, this lifestyle is built around this proximity and the prudence in avoiding all association with the fairy realm. The Englishness that is presented in these texts is then built upon the notion of avoiding something foreign that has always been present adjacent, underneath, or inside England. This foreign element should not necessarily be translated as Celtic, but in a more general sense mirrors the certainty of what Englishness meant at the time that the texts are set, in contrast to the uncertainty of the history of the geographical realm of England, and its inhabitants.

From this view can be concluded that these texts present a mode of Englishness believed to be present from the late medieval to the Victorian period, as it is presented in literature, rather than historical or demographic accounts. This Englishness is represented in the texts as a community spirit founded on the exclusion of physically or behaviourally diverging individuals. These are the ones who are called fairies, pointing to sources in ballads, where the fairies are foreigners or outsiders, rather than folklore, where they are

more commonly small beings, sometimes mischievous, but never as threatening as an Other of human size. *Lud-in-the-Mist* revolves around the suspicion of characters of uncertain identity that are suspected of being fairies, while Clarke's Simonelli is equally unreliable if his father was Italian or a fairy. Clarke furthermore offers an anecdote in *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* of a man who suspected his coachman of being a fairy because he could talk to animals. The case was taken to court, and subsequently the coachman was declared to be human by English law.⁵⁸ Clarke's English characters are in general suspicious of anyone who is tall, dark and mysterious, just like Mirrlees' Dorimarites believe red hair to be a sign of fairy relations, while among unidentified individuals, Clarke's Vinculus is never accused of fairy-hood, while Mirrlees' Portunus is.⁵⁹ With the exception of *Smith of Wootton Major*, all other texts discussed in this chapter reach their climax when the boundary between the primary and secondary worlds collapses. The villagers of *Lud-in-the-Mist* fling their gates open to allow 'The Silent People' to saunter through, to the effect that

trees broke into leaf and the masts of all the ships in the bay into blossom; that day and nights the cocks crowed without ceasing; that violets and anemones sprang up through the snow in the streets, and that mothers embraced their dead sons, and maids their sweethearts drowned at sea.⁶⁰

Tristan Thorne remains in Faerie as the righteous Lord of Stormhold, while Stephen Black, having defeated the gentleman with the thistle-down hair, is made King of Lost-hope. Tolkien still adheres in his fairy story to the doctrine of Recovery as resolution, Smith goes back to his realm and Alf to his, and order is restored.⁶¹ Smith is at one point harshly dismissed from Faery when a birch tells him to 'Go away! The wind is hunting you. You do

⁵⁸ Clarke, *Strange*, pp. 71-73n.

⁵⁹ While these two characters do have some intertextual relation, both being old, unidentified men known by Latin names: *Vinculus*, from *vinculum*, 'fetters', and *Portunus*, possibly from *portare*, 'carry' or 'transport'. Lewis and Short *sub* 'vinculum' and 'portare'.

⁶⁰ Mirrlees, p. 234.

⁶¹ Tolkien, 'On Fairy-stories', p. 52.

not belong here. Go away and never return!’⁶² Shippey suggests that Tolkien might have felt that he ‘trespassed’ too far into the Perilous Realm in his Middle-earth fiction, which may explain why Smith eventually gives up the star that allows him to access Faery.⁶³ As mentioned above, Tolkien is of the opinion that humans do not properly belong in the Otherworld, this being the fundamental difference between *Smith of Wootton Major* and most other accounts of Faerie. This perception of the Chosen One who is admitted into Faerie and rewarded by its people shows a continuum reaching from the earliest stories of this realm in the French tradition, to those of modern Fantasy, that do not owe much to Tolkien’s Middle-earth legendarium. Human-sized fairies in modern fantasy can then commonly be found closer to the mundane world, while elves, in the post-Tolkienian sense, are found in completely fantastic worlds, as later chapters will go on to explore.

⁶² Tolkien, *Smith*, p. 30.

⁶³ Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, p. 317.

Chapter 11: Scrolls of Colours: Elves in Comics and Film

i. Inherited and created myths

As primarily visual forms, comics and film have profoundly influenced the contemporary image of the elf. While book illustrations have in the past allowed for the elf-figure to be visualised, comic books brought it into a new genre. The SF genre of comic books began with the superhero comics published in America from the 1930s.¹ These were originally marketed for children, adding to the already significant status problem of the wider genre of SF.

Superhero comics of this period did not in general feature deities and other mythological beings, with the notable exception of Marvel Comics' *Thor*. The great plethora of

mythological characters did not begin to be explored until the new wave of SF in the late 1980s and early 90s, for example in the titles discussed in this chapter, *The Sandman*, its

spin-off series *The Books of Magic*, and *Hellboy*. These were also fictions marketed for adults, and were re-classified (or upgraded) from comics to graphic novels.² The superhero

period in comics can be seen as a replacement mythology for an American audience:

superheroes have many of the same powers as mythological deities and heroes, yet they do

not refer to any particular tradition of belief. *Sandman* writer Neil Gaiman and *Hellboy*

creator Mike Mignola make creative and indiscriminate use of religions, mythologies and

supernatural beings and phenomena from any culture or tradition, with the additive of

completely fictional characters. Gaiman's reason for featuring an all-inclusive mythology is

personal, and stems from growing up as a Jew in a Church of England school. He says in the

autobiographical short story 'One Life, Furnished in Early Moorcock':

¹ The term SF is usually spelled out as science fiction but commonly also includes fantasy and horror. However, many SF writers, for example Margaret Atwood and Harlan Ellison, champion the transcription as 'speculative fiction', a term outlined by Robert A. Heinlein, that narrows SF to fiction that is scientifically possible, and thus excludes fantasy and other fictions that feature magical or otherwise impossible elements. For a discussion of this term, see Darren Harris-Fain, *Understanding Contemporary American Science Fiction: The Age of Maturity 1970-2000* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), p. 13.

² For an overview of graphic novels for adults, see Roger Sabin, *Comics, Comix & Graphic Novels* (London: Phaidon, 1996), pp. 157-75.

The weekend was now given to the intricate patterns and language of Judaism; each weekday morning to the wood-scented, stained-glass solemnities of the Church of England; and the nights belonged to his own religion, the one he made up for himself, a strange, multicolored pantheon in which the Lord of Chaos (Arioch, Xiombarg, and the rest), rubbed shoulders with the Phantom Stranger from the DC Comics and Sam the Trickster-Buddha from Zelazny's *Lord of Light*, and vampires and talking cats and ogres, and all the things from mythologies existed simultaneously in a magnificent anarchy of belief.³

This 'anarchy of belief', as Gaiman puts it, does not discriminate between characters that are or have been believed in, and completely fictional ones. The mixing of invented and inherited mythos can be seen as a phenomenon of an increasingly global and secular world and can probably be viewed as the antithesis of nationalism: any cultural heritage and belief system is as valid as any other and can be adapted to suit the needs of the text. The tendency to mix belief and fiction in this way is particularly common in American SF. The folklorist Richard M. Dorson explains it with the fact that the American population is of mixed cultural origins:

One question that has always intrigued me is what happens to demonic beings when immigrants move from their homelands. Irish-Americans remember the fairies, Norwegian-Americans the *nisser*, Greek-Americans the *vrykolakas*, but only in relation to events remembered in the Old Country. When I once asked why such demons are not seen in America, my informant giggled confusedly and said, 'They're scared to pass the ocean, it's too far,' pointing out that Christ and the apostles never came to America.⁴

This comment is used as the foreword to Neil Gaiman's novel *American Gods*. In this text Gaiman proposes, like Dorson, that mythological beings and gods are not inherently linked with the land in which they were believed in, but rather with the people who believed in them, and their descendants. In Gaiman's opinion, stories and legends belong to the people. He says,

We have the right, and the obligation, to tell old stories in our own ways, because they are *our* stories.⁵

³ Neil Gaiman in Hy Bender, *The Sandman Companion* (London: Titan Books, 1999), pp. 105-6.

⁴ Richard M. Dorson in Neil Gaiman, *American Gods* (London: Headline, 2004). For further elaboration on this view, see Richard M. Dorson, ed., *Handbook of American Folklore* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).

⁵ Gaiman in Bender, p. xi.

Since the raw material of his and other modern fantasy writers' own stories come from folk traditions, it is within the rights of the author to pass them on in a manner that suits him or her. *American Gods* is a continuation of the system of mixed lore that Gaiman developed for the *Sandman* graphic novel series. Here, human-sized fairies appear alongside an abundance of other beings, and the realm of Faerie is only one of many other worlds. Fairies are then not *the* Significant Other to humans because there are so many varieties of sentient beings in the texts, and the issue of status is also compromised since gods act alongside humans, fantastic beings, monsters, talking animals and sculptures, and anthropomorphic personifications like The Sandman, more commonly known as Dream or Morpheus.

ii. *The Sandman*

The Sandman, first published in 1988, was part of the new wave of comics for adults published in America and written mostly by Britons, among them Alan Moore (*Watchmen*, *V For Vendetta*, *From Hell*, *Swamp Thing* and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*), Jamie Delano (*Hellblazer*, *Captain Britain*), and Neil Gaiman (*The Sandman* and its spin-off series *The Books of Magic*). The eponymous protagonist of *The Sandman*, more often called Dream or Morpheus, is an anthropomorphic personification of dream and also the origin of stories. Gaiman first introduces fairies in the episode 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. In the *Sandman* series, Shakespeare is when first encountered a quite unpromising young playwright who is given the gift of inspiration from Dream on the condition that he produces two plays for him. These are *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, the only two not directly based on earlier sources. The episode chronicles the premiere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to Dream and a specially invited audience: the real court of Faerie. Gaiman locates the performance to the Sussex Downs, because of its use by Rudyard Kipling as the

setting for *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies*.⁶ The scene is more precisely set below the chalk outline known as the Long Man of Wilmington. Gaiman claims the name Wilmington is a contraction of 'Wendel's Mound Town', and therefore gives the Long Man the name Wendel, who in the episode acts as gatekeeper to Faerie. He elaborates that Wendel comes from the Old Norse *venda*, meaning 'to change course, to travel, to move forward'.⁷ The translation is correct but the relation to the name Wendel is erroneous: Wendel is usually reckoned to be a version of the Anglo-Saxon name Earendil, in Old Norse Egil, brother of Weland the smith.⁸ Gaiman's fairies are, as in Shakespeare's play, ruled by Titania and Auberon. The French spelling of Auberon is used to combine the Arthurian character with the Shakespearian one, and Titania is also known as Mab in other parts of *The Sandman* and the spin-off series *The Books of Magic*.

The performance of the play goes according to plan until the intermission, when the fairies show their true nature. The real Puck knocks out the actor Dick Cowley, who plays his part, transforms into Cowley, and subsequently plays himself in the later part of the play. Simultaneously, Titania approaches Hamnet Shakespeare, who plays the Indian boy, and tempts him with fairy fruit and strange tales. The morning after the performance, Hamnet says that he has had a strange dream about a great lady who wanted to take him to a distant land. This is, in effect, true because the play is indeed a dream. Hamnet's dream seems to have been realised, as the afterword reads: 'Hamnet Shakespeare died in 1596, aged eleven. Robin Goodfellow's present whereabouts are unknown.'⁹ It seems that Hamnet was abducted by Puck at Titania's request, since he reappears in the spin-off *The Books of Magic* as

⁶ Gaiman in Bender, p. 75-76

⁷ Gaiman in Bender, p. 76, Cleasby and Vigfusson *sub* 'venda'.

⁸ For elaboration on this, see for example Grimm, I: 374-76.

⁹ Neil Gaiman, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', in *The Sandman: Dream Country*, Charles Vess, ill. (New York: DC Comics, 1995), pp. 62-86 (p. 86).

Titania's pageboy, dressed as the Indian boy.¹⁰ Gaiman's treatment of Puck is particularly interesting: he retains his characteristic 'Ho ho *ho!*' from *The Life of Robin Goodfellow*, but he is not the boyish prankster of the pamphlet.¹¹ He is not in fact considered to be on the same level as the human-looking characters (i.e. the real humans, Dream, Auberon and Titania), but more of a talking animal and a pet to Auberon.

Gaiman does describe the hierarchy of Faerie, and the relationship between the fairies and other beings. Auberon and Titania are in the 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' episode clearly above the human actors. It is evident that Titania is the dominant of the pair in *The Sandman* and *The Books of Magic*. The alternative name Mab indicates an inclusion of the Irish queen Medb in the character, who is indeed dominant over her husband Ailill in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* ('The Cattle-raid of Cooley').¹² The *Sandman* series also features two other significant fairies, also from the Irish tradition. The brother and sister pair Cluracan and Nuala first appears as ambassadors of the court of Faerie in the volume *Seasons of Mist*. Cluracan is immediately set up as a drunkard who is very full of himself, combining the being he is named after – the *cluricaune* is in Irish folklore the drunken fairy, a small humanoid being commonly found in wine cellars – and the arrogance that often is a quality of the Gentry-type.¹³ His sister Nuala has been brought as a gift to Dream from Titania. Cluracan and Nuala both serve Titania while Puck serves Auberon, pointing out that the marital disputes of the king and queen of Faerie has been transported from Shakespeare's play to Gaiman's narratives. Cluracan also plays an important part in the volume *Worlds' End* which is Gaiman's take on *The Canterbury Tales*, but here set in the unlocated place of

¹⁰ Neil Gaiman, *The Books of Magic* (New York: DC Comics, 1991), chapter III: 'The Land of Summer's Twilight'. This is the first in the series, the only one written by Neil Gaiman, and has no subtitle. It also lacks page numbers.

¹¹ Collier.

¹² Kinsella, trans., *The Táin*.

¹³ Briggs, *Dictionary of Fairies* sub 'Cluricaune'; MacKillop sub 'Cluricaune'. MacKillop give the original name as Clúracán, so Gaiman's spelling keeps close to the source.

the title, which can only be found by those who get lost.¹⁴ Here Cluracan tells a story about another time when he was serving as an ambassador for the queen of Faerie, here called Mab, gets into trouble and is clasped in irons: as Gaiman is referring to folklore, his fairies are averse to iron, so Cluracan cannot use his magic to escape. In this episode, Mab and Nuala are portrayed as extremely dainty (Nuala even has butterfly wings), while Cluracan looks much like a human, without pointed ears. The different illustrators here add variation to the tales, just as the *Canterbury Tales* vary their style. What is apparent from Cluracan's narrative is Gaiman sets him up as the apotheosis of the arrogance of the Gentry-type of fairy: he drinks and sleeps with anyone he chooses, and when his insolence lands him in trouble, he is appreciated enough for others to bail him out.

iii. Hellboy

In contrast to Gaiman's loose form of narrative where folklore and mythology is used freely and continuously, Mike Mignola's comic about the demon paranormal investigator Hellboy has a somewhat stricter pattern. Hellboy travels to the place of the disturbance and deals with it, often stepping into a folktale or legend in doing so. As in *The Sandman*, fairies are only one of many types of beings encountered. In 'The Corpse', Hellboy travels to a family in Ireland that has been left with a changeling. He banishes the changeling, called Gruagach, with iron, who during his flight gives instructions about how to return the real child, a girl called Alice. Hellboy is to go the crossroads and meet three little men, who are to give further directions. These tell him to take the corpse of a man hanged there to be buried, giving him the names of five cemeteries that he might try to do this in. Hellboy is hindered from doing this by burning corpses at the two first, a bouncing rock at the third, an invisible enemy fighting back at the fourth, and Grom, the monster champion of Connacht, at the fifth. His last enemy vanquished and the corpse buried, the little men agree to give Alice back. 'The

¹⁴Neil Gaiman, *The Sandman: Worlds' End* (New York: DC Comics, 1994). Note the plural form. The place is at the end of many worlds.

Corpse' is based on an Irish folktale, 'Teig O'Kane and the Corpse', though Mignola has added several elements from Irish and English folklore not present in the original.¹⁵ In the folktale, Teig O'Kane is given the task of burying the corpse by the little men, but this is not to gain anything in return, but to cure him of his extravagant manner and teach him humility. Mignola then incorporates the changeling framework and the characters of Gruagach and also Jenny Greenteeth out of the English tradition, in order to make the tale a thoroughly folkloric outing. Gruagach is accounted in Irish folklore as a kind of wildman, his name meaning 'hairy', but the character depicted in the comic seems to have more in common with Robin Goodfellow in appearance and behaviour.¹⁶ The monster Grom claims to have fought Cúchulainn, but there is no mention of any such being in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. The name is instead imported from a pulp SF short story by Robert E. Howard called *Worms of the Earth* that incorporates elements from Irish mythology.¹⁷ Mignola reproduces the first four lines of William Allingham's poem 'The Fairies' in the introductory image of the story portraying the king of the Sidhe, probably because the poem appears in the same collection as 'Teig O'Kane and the Corpse', edited by W. B. Yeats.¹⁸ The king is the most passive character among the fairies featured in the episode, and it is instead Gruagach who instigates the hindering of Hellboy's mission, acting directly against the king's wishes to honour Hellboy's valour and the deal to return the child that was struck, 'though by the doing, we die a little more.'¹⁹ It is not the king who in the end hands Alice back, but one of the little men, who offers the following explanation for the abduction:

The Daoine Sith would 'ave raised the child as one of their own. No 'arm would 'ave ever come to 'er. No living child of our race 'as been born into this century and no

¹⁵ Douglas Hyde, trans., 'Teig O'Kane and the Corpse', in W. B. Yeats, ed., *Irish Folk Stories and Fairy Tales* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1957), pp. 17-30.

¹⁶ MacKillop *sub* 'Gruagach'.

¹⁷ Robert E. Howard, *Worms of the Earth* (New York: Ace Books, 1987).

¹⁸ William Allingham, 'The Fairies', in Yeats, ed., *Irish Folk Stories*, pp. 5-7.

¹⁹ Mike Mignola, 'The Corpse', in *Hellboy: The Chained Coffin and Others* (Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Comics, 1998). The volume lacks page numbers.

more will ever come. We know this. The years, they beat upon us like the ocean upon a stone...we are worn away. [...] Soon I think the king will gather us and march us down into the shadows under the world where the old people go. Too late the sons of Adam will cry: where are the children of the Earth? Gone. Look for, but you shall not find them. Weep...for they are gone forever.²⁰

The Daoine Sith reappear in another *Hellboy* episode called 'The Third Wish'.²¹ The king is here named as Dagda, being the name of the father-god and druid of the Tuatha de Danann,²² and like in 'The Corpse' he passively observes Hellboy's fight, here with a mermaid. Dagda does express his desire that Hellboy should survive in order for him to lead an army of supernatural beings in battle in the future. Like Auberon but Titania in particular in *The Sandman*, Dagda demands a certain authority, not because of his actions (which are few) but because he thinks that he naturally deserves it, being ruler of the Daoine Sith.

iv. Hellboy II: The Golden Army

The planned war between supernatural beings and humans forms the basis for the film *Hellboy 2: the Golden Army*, written and directed by Guillermo del Toro.²³ Del Toro renames the king Balor, another name out of Irish mythology but not one of the Tuatha de Danann, but instead king of the Fomorians, a monstrous race and adversaries of the Tuatha de.²⁴ The king has in the film retained the passive element from the comic, to the displeasure of his son, Nuada, who in a fit of elf-arrogance wants to make his presence known to humans as he thinks hiding does not benefit an elf-prince. Nuada, his name derived from a king of the Tuatha de Danann, means to wage the war mentioned in 'The Third Wish', but not with the aid of Hellboy, whom he seems to know nothing about, but by awakening the Golden Army of the title.²⁵ The army consists of mechanicals created by goblin blacksmiths for a similar

²⁰ Mignola, 'The Corpse'.

²¹ Mike Mignola, 'The Third Wish', in *Strange Places* (Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Comics, 2006). The volume lacks page numbers.

²² McKillop *sub* 'Daghda'.

²³ *Hellboy II: The Golden Army*, Guillermo del Toro, dir., Universal Studios, 2008.

²⁴ McKillop *sub* 'Balor'.

²⁵ McKillop *sub* 'Nuadha'.

war between supernatural beings and humans that occurred long ago. In this first war Balor finally made peace with the humans and the Golden Army was put to sleep. The method for awakening and commanding the army is to assemble a golden crown that has been split up into three pieces, out of which one is in the care of Balor, whom Nuada kills, one in human hands and is quickly acquired, but the third part is held by Nuada's twin sister, Nuala, who opposes her brother's cause and flees. The name Nuala has a more complex story in Irish mythology and folklore. It is a diminutive of Finnguala, originally one of the children of Lir, who were turned into swans by their stepmother. In the tale, Finnguala indeed has a twin, Áed, and two other siblings. In oral tradition Nuala also became another name for Una, wife of Finnbheara, king of the Connacht fairies, which is probably the tradition drawn upon for the film.²⁶ The names Nuada and Nuala are, however, not related, nor are the mythological characters.

In the present day of the film, the elves seem to be living under New York, and prince Nuada sets out to challenge the human domination of the Earth, as he says, with their love of concrete and metal, considering himself a representative of the community of supernatural beings and thus worthy to awaken the Golden Army. There are reasons to sympathise with Nuada in his role as a warrior for a just cause, in this case, the environment. This is best illustrated by the incident when he releases an elemental in the form of a giant living flower that threatens to devastate New York. Nuada reminds Hellboy that he is not human either, and that killing the elemental will make him choose the side of the humans, finally pleading: 'It is the last of its kind, like you and me.'²⁷ When its body falls, the streets of New York sprouts trees, flowers and moss. Though Nuada may be sympathetic, he does not have the following of a single one of his people. Another questionable aspect of Nuada's righteousness

²⁶ McKillop *sub* 'Finnbheara', 'Finnguala', 'Nuala', and 'Una'.

²⁷ *Hellboy II: The Golden Army*, del Toro, dir. This is not true in Nuada's case as there is a host of elves visible in Balor's throne room.

is the fact that the Golden Army itself consist of mechanicals - magic perhaps, but not organic beings. The Army is held underground near the Giant's Causeway in County Antrim, Northern Ireland, in a *sidhe* then, it is understood. The entrance is formed by a stone giant who stands up on the command of one of the locals, an unnamed being who would probably be reckoned as of the fairy sort.²⁸ Again del Toro uses existing mythology but displaces it: the giant should correctly, if such a word is suitable to be used, be Fionn Mac Cumhal, but the stone giant is not named, nor does he seem animate, yet answers to a magical command.

Del Toro then makes plenty of references to mythological and folkloristic accounts, yet he displaces them, seemingly with the same attitude as Neil Gaiman towards the writer's freedom with traditional narratives. He says about the medium of comics that

In the comic, because the comic is ultimately a visual/literary form, you have the chance of exploring folklore from an almost professorial/academic point of view with the fun of pulp.²⁹

He goes on to comment that the medium of film does not allow for as much explanation of the beings featured, which is why del Toro chose to incorporate beings that would already be familiar to viewers, like the elves.³⁰ Already by using the word *elf* the film appeals to fans of *The Lord of the Rings*, and in particular Peter Jackson's films. While del Toro's elves have names out of Irish folklore, their appearance and behaviour is derived in greater part from Jackson's films. Nuada's wardrobe seems to be handed down from the film version of Legolas, so too the knives on his back. The brother and sister team of Nuada and Nuala cannot either be separated from Cluracan and Nuala: in both fictions, the brother is the arrogant one, while the sister the level-headed sibling who rejects this superior attitude and has sympathy for humans and other beings. The sisters are never treated by the other

²⁸ Cf. Gaiman's gatekeeper Wendel. Several more giant gatekeepers appear in *The Books of Magic* series.

²⁹ Del Toro in Remy Minnick, 'Guillermo del Toro talks "Hellboy II"', <<http://www.comicbookresources.com/?page=article&id=16259>>, accessed 20 October 2008, published 1 May 2008.

³⁰ Del Toro in Minnick.

characters as any lesser than their haughty brothers who demand respect rather than earning it, indicating that arrogance is not an essential part of the nobility of fictional elves, though often carelessly appended to it by modern Fantasy writers.

v. *Elfquest*

The question whether elves should be perceived as above humans is also addressed in a completely elf-centred comic. Wendy and Richard Pini's *Elfquest* has been published by their own company Warp Graphics since 1978 and is still going. The Pinis' elves have little in common with the ones found in folklore and other literary accounts as regards temperament and qualities, while their appearance is influenced by earlier narratives: they are four foot tall, have large pointed ears and slanted eyes. However, their ancestors are more likely to be the Vulcans of *Star Trek* than Tolkien's Eldar: they are in fact aliens, and the planet where the comic is set is not Earth but known as the World of Two Moons. Wendy Pini explains that

The elves of *Elfquest* are not mythological creatures. They are evolved, shape-shifting aliens who adopted elfin traits breed true because of the high survival rate/value of all who possess those characteristics. The progenitors of this elflike race, who have been nicknamed the Coneheads, were slender humanoids with elongated limbs and somewhat conical skulls.³¹

The Coneheads evolve into the High Ones, which are the elves who land on the World of Two Moons. Their intention was to land during the world's 'middle ages' in order to be welcome by humans who appreciate these kinds of beings.³² Their ship, shaped like a palace, was however thrust out of its temporal course by the servants of the High Ones, whom the Pinis call trolls, so that the whole party ended up in the equivalent of the Mesolithic. While the sturdy trolls were well suited for the harsh environment and kept their original form, the frail High Ones were subject to 'degeneration' into the dwarvish form they assume in the

³¹ Wendy Pini in Cherie Wilkerson and Richard Pini, eds, *The Big Elfquest Gatherum* (Poughkeepsie, NY: Warp Graphics, 1994), p. 92.

³² Wendy and Richard Pini. *Elfquest* #20: *Quest's End, Part 2*, p. 27, *Elfquest.com*, <<http://www.elfquest.com/gallery/OnlineComics/OQ/OQ11/DisplayOQ20.html?page=27>>, accessed 29 October 2008.

comic. The High Ones have much more in common with the Tolkienian Elves than their dwarvish descendants, a development that will be further discussed below. The quest of *Elfquest*, then, is one that several tribes of the dwarvish elves, led by the Wolfriders, go on to find out exactly who they are and where they came from. Their only clues to this are gathered from stories told by humans, about 'demons' that came to their world from thundering clouds.³³ The primitive humans therefore fear and dislike elves since they think them alien to their world. It is through the opinion of the humans that any resemblance to elves in folklore comes through, especially after the comic jumps from a Mesolithic setting to a medieval one: elves are the 'Hidden Ones', and are considered by the more sympathetic humans as good, and by the less so as bad spirits. The Pinis insistence that their elves are not mythological beings is somewhat hampered by the use of the word magic and the presence of the trolls in the comic.

The main plotline in the comic is for the Wolfriders to discover other elves and ultimately their alien origin. While three of the tribes, the Wolfriders, the Sun People and the Go-backs, are of dwarvish size, the Gliders of the Blue Mountain retain the stature of the High Ones and have lived in isolation a lifestyle imitative of that of their noble ancestors. The problem is that the Gliders, who have many similarities to Tolkienian elves, are sinister and arrogant, in particular the anti-healer Winnowill, who is immediately patronising to the Wolfriders:

My, my! How our scattered decedents have degenerated! Not only have their bodies shrunk – their sense of honor seems to have vanished completely!³⁴

³³ See for example Wendy and Richard Pini, *Elfquest # 6: The Quest Begins*, p. 16, *Elfquest.com*, <<http://www.elfquest.com/gallery/OnlineComics/OQ/OQ06/DisplayOQ06.html?page=15>>, accessed 28 October 2008.

³⁴ Wendy and Richard Pini, *Elfquest # 11: Lair of the Bird Spirits*, p. 21, <<http://www.elfquest.com/gallery/OnlineComics/OQ/OQ11/DisplayOQ11.html?page=21>>, accessed 29 October 2008.

The quest finally leads back to the palace-ship, and the Wolfriders' ancestor, Timmain, a shape-shifter of the High Ones, who shows them a 'recording' of what happened to the High Ones via the magical objects known as the Scrolls of Colors. Timmain had transformed herself into a wolf in order to survive the harsh climate of the World with Two Moons, and subsequently gave birth to an elf-wolf hybrid, Timmorn, the first chieftain of the Wolfriders. This 'taint' of mortal blood is the main reason why the Wolfriders are considered to be a lowly kind by the other elfin tribes, who are descendants of other High Ones. It also brings with it mortality: the Wolfriders do age and die, while the elves of the other tribes are as unageing and immortal, which is at least one feature they have in common with most other versions of elves. Timmain goes on to explain that her decision to create her hybrid son was in order to make the elves properly part of the World of Two Moons, to thus justify their presence there, while the other High Ones could not accept an existence where they were not invulnerable, supreme beings. This attitude still comes through in the portrayal of Timmain. She is worshipped as a goddess by the other elves and cannot be approached as an equal. In much the same way that Tolkien treats the Eldar, the *Elfquest* writers present Timmain as worthy of reverence because she is a real High One in contrast to Winnowill, who is not.

vi. Elf-arrogance

The *Elfquest* elves, then, are debased for a good cause, and this points to another reason why the Pinis have avoided Tolkienian associations. Winnowill, and to an extent Timmain, should then be seen as of the type of elf/fairy already exemplified by Gaiman's Cluracan and del Toro's Nuada, as degenerate nobles belonging to a long lost world. The Gentry-type in these fictions are examples of the elf-arrogance that the Eldar also possess, which is completely missed by Tolkien as he considers class differences to be natural. This is a characteristic that has survived from medieval narratives: the Tuatha de Danann and the French people of the fairy, for example, demand respect rather than earning it, so do many of the elves and fairies

that appear in ballads. This arrogance is often present in modern Fantasy, usually to point out the superiority of elves over other peoples, and is only sometimes criticised. It seems that like androgynous appearance, arrogance is now a feature of modern elves and is to be expected as part of the role of elves in modern Fantasy and is particularly prevalent in fictions in the style of Tolkien. The modern Fantasy elf has features assembled from many sources but is often believed to have been straightforwardly created by Tolkien, as the next chapter will go on to discuss.

Chapter 12: Post-Tolkienian Fantasy

i. Genres

This chapter will discuss the notion of a stereotypical or stock Fantasy elf and the perception that this character is derived from Tolkien's writing. While the concept of a tall, noble and beautiful being is found in Tolkien's texts and indeed most other texts that incorporate human-sized elves, many features consensually attributed to this being are not. The texts discussed in this chapter belong to two sub-genres that are often confused because of the similarity of subject matter and style and often lumped together in a dismissive way, as for example by Colin Greenland:

For the most part heroic fantasy, 'sword-and-sorcery' as it is often called, is the most degenerate kind of fantasy fiction. As indiscriminate mix of elements from ancient literature and legend, distilled from an even more diluted epic tradition, it is imitative, crude, and rarely more than a reiteration of conventions.¹

The term *Sword and Sorcery* has been applied primarily to a type of fiction popularised by Robert E. Howard's stories of Conan the Barbarian in the 1930s, but the genre also includes works by Poul Anderson, H. P. Lovecraft, and Lord Dunsany.² These fictions are typically short stories published in magazines and anthologies, and can probably best be described as pulp fantasy. Texts in the genre of *Heroic Fantasy*, also called *Epic Fantasy* or *High Fantasy*, are typically over five hundred pages and often come in trilogies, cycles or series set in the same world. These commonly include maps, pronunciation guides, lists of characters and other addenda that help the reader fathom the world within the text.³ The genre of Heroic Fantasy was not invented by Tolkien: Pringle mentions William Morris's *The Well at the World's End* from 1896 and E. R. Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros* from 1922 as seminal

¹ Colin Greenland, *The Entropy Exhibition: Michael Moorcock and the British 'New Wave' in Science Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 122-23. See also Poul Anderson's criticism of Heroic Fantasy 'On Thud and Blunder', posted on the *Science Fiction Writers of America* website, <<http://www.sfwaweb.org/writing/thud.htm>>, published 4 January 2005, accessed 14 June 2009.

² David Pringle, *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (London: Carlton, 2006), p. 33.

³ Pringle, pp. 35-36.

works for defining the genre.⁴ Tolkien acknowledged Morris's writing as a source of inspiration, and called Eddison 'the greatest and most convincing writer of "invented worlds" that I have read. But he was certainly not an "influence"'.⁵ *The Lord of the Rings* is, however, the origin of the 'Epic trilogy' format, inadvertently so, because of the decision by the publisher Rayner Unwin to print the book in three volumes.⁶

ii. Appearance of modern Fantasy elves

Narratives in both genres tend to revolve around a hero and his adventures, episodic in nature in Sword and Sorcery, and questing in Heroic Fantasy. While the texts discussed in this chapter belong rather to the genre of Heroic Fantasy than Sword and Sorcery, the influence of pulp literature on the development of the stock fantasy elf cannot be ignored. The first writer to challenge the 'Conanical' style of Sword and Sorcery is arguably Michael Moorcock, whose stories of Elric of Melniboné first appeared in print in 1961. Elric is an immortal with typically elvish looks: pointed ears, chiselled facial features with high cheekbones, slanted eyes and a slim, androgynous body.⁷ Despite this, Elric is never described as an elf. He is in fact never given any 'race' whatsoever but is referred to by his nationality as a Melnibonéan. In the Elric-stories, Moorcock is attempting to get away from Fantasy stereotypes by making Elric the first anti-hero of the genre: he is a frail albino and must be on constant medication to survive, and is neither particularly good nor brave. When asked about the elvish features of Elric and the other Melnibonéans on his webforum, Moorcock replies that

those looks weren't originally considered 'elvish' so much as 'alien'. As I've said elsewhere, there were many humanoids who had those looks in the pulp magazines I preferred to read as a boy. Only over the years, thanks to Tolkien and those who have

⁴ Pringle, p. 36.

⁵ Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 303 (letter 226 to Professor L. W. Forster, 1960), and p. 258 (letter 199 to Caroline Everett, 1957).

⁶ Tolkien, *Letters*, pp. 165-67 (letter 136 to Rayner Unwin, 1953).

⁷ See for example Michael Moorcock, *Elric* (London: Gollancz, 2001), pp. 5-6.

drawn and otherwise represented his elves, have those looks become standard elf looks.⁸

Moorcock does admit drawing inspiration from Poul Anderson's portrayal of Imric in *The Broken Sword*, and confirms his knowledge of Lord Dunsany – Elric is at least in name descended from Imric and Alveric – but also comments that his knowledge of elves and fairies in mythology and folklore is very limited.⁹ Moorcock, then, should be considered as not consciously writing in a tradition of *A Literary History of Elves*, while still using this type of figure as an Other: Elric and his people are humanoid enough to be equal to humans, but alien enough for it to be clear that they should not be expected to look and act quite like humans. It is therefore impossible to ignore influences on the stock fantasy elf from characters that are not elves as this matter is quite complex: slanted eyes, high cheekbones, and androgynous appearance of the males are not features mentioned by Tolkien, and he did nowhere in his fiction describe the elves as having pointed ears. This later image has instead been projected onto Tolkien's Eldar and they have subsequently been perceived as the origin of this image, as demonstrated by Moorcock's comment above.

Elric is an example of a recurring problem in popular Fantasy fiction. If a Fantasy writer wants to use a humanoid yet non-human race, s/he is likely to encounter the elf-dilemma: if the elf is too like Tolkien's Eldar, the text will be dismissed by other writers as unimaginative; if the elf is too unlike the post-Tolkienian image, the reader might make the 'wrong' association with a less noble being, for example the dwarvish sort of elves found in for example J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* books. Writers of Heroic Fantasy would have enough problems with being taken seriously because of the genre they write in without having to argue for the nobility of their elves and against

⁸ Michael Moorcock, forum post to topic 'Melnibonean-elvish looks', 23 February 2005, *Moorcock's Miscellany*, <<http://www.multiverse.org/fora/showthread.php?t=2001>>, accessed 30 November 2008.

⁹ Moorcock in *Moorcock's Miscellany*, posted 23 February, 24 February and 6 March 2005, accessed 30 November 2008.

the dismissal of their texts as children's literature, which the dwarvish elf clearly signals. If the elf is not 'elvish' enough, (which should be more correctly understood as *elven*, Tolkien's adapted word), then the writer can be criticised for debasing this noble being. The most popular writers of fantasy, Robert Jordan and David Eddings, avoid the use of elves altogether, despite writing in a clearly Tolkienian tradition. The genre of Heroic Fantasy is evidently in general imitative of Tolkien, and it is then expected that the elves should follow suit: these types of texts should be perceived as twice-removed types of narratives, where the writers for the most part do not utilise themes and characters out of medieval and ancient narratives like Tolkien did, but instead imitate his themes and characters directly. This is indeed a reason for dismissing Heroic Fantasy as Greenland does in the passage above, although the phenomenon demands much closer scrutiny.

iii. Inheritance Cycle

Writers of Heroic Fantasy must then carefully consider how to treat the 'elf-problem'. The discussion below will provide examples from three levels of separation from Tolkien's Eldar, in order to demonstrate what can reasonably be done with the character while still conforming to genre expectations. The first two fictions are very direct adaptations of the Eldar, while the two intermediate texts are still mainstream fantasy but handle the 'elf-problem' differently, while the two final texts clearly challenge Tolkien's style, although the elves in the texts are still recognisable as such. The first two of these texts have been harshly dismissed by both critics and other fantasy writers for their imitative style: Terry Brooks's *Shannara* series, its first volume published in 1977, and Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle*, published from 2002.¹⁰ Christopher Paolini is the latest fantasy writer to be dismissed by critics for extensive use of Tolkienian influences. His at present three books about the farm boy Eragon who becomes a dragon rider are directed to a teenage audience and should

¹⁰ See for example Pringle, p. 37.

therefore be evaluated in the light of potentially being the first fantasy text a young person encounters, and not necessarily a reader accustomed to the conventions of Heroic Fantasy. Paolini's Tolkienisms reach the proportions that some names of people and places seem only slight misspellings of Tolkien's, for example Eragon, Melian, Ardwen, and Furnost, and *elda* is a polite title for elves. Much of the intrigue in the *Inheritance Cycle* has to do with Eragon's relationship with the elves, and he finds out from Brom, his first mentor and informant, that he is named after the first dragon rider, who was an elf. When Eragon later spends time in the company of elves he begins to develop elvish features, despite not genetically being part-elvish,¹¹ and is instead magically transformed into a human-elf hybrid by the elves and the dragons. The elves in the *Inheritance Cycle* are then facilitators of Eragon's quest, in particular his companion Arya. The first elf encountered in the first part, *Eragon*, does seem somewhat familiar to more experienced fantasy readers:

On the first horse was an elf with pointed ears and elegantly slanted eyebrows. His build was slim but strong, like a rapier. A powerful bow was slung on his back. A sword pressed against his side opposite a quiver of arrows fletched with swan feathers.¹²

Most texts describing elves do take for granted some prior knowledge of them, but Paolini here feels the need to inform his readers that elves have pointed ears. This is the feature that Paolini singles out as the hallmark of elves, which is made clear in the passage where Eragon first sees Arya, but does not realise that she is an elf until he sees her pointed ears. Paolini also summarises other popular features of elves, in particular those relating to androgyny:

Though all four were male, their faces resembled Arya's, with delicate lips, thin noses, and large slanted eyes that shone under their brows. The rest of their bodies matched, with narrow shoulders and slender arms and legs. Each was more fair and noble than any human Eragon had seen, albeit in a rarefied, exotic manner.¹³

¹¹ As far as can be discerned from the first three parts of the *Inheritance Cycle*. The fourth and final part has not yet been published.

¹² Christopher Paolini, *Eragon* (London: Corgi, 2005), p. 2.

¹³ Christopher Paolini, *Eldest* (London: Corgi, 2006), pp. 167-68.

The fallacy of this statement is of course that Eragon does not identify Arya's features as particularly elvish at the time. Many features of elves found in the *Inheritance Cycle* are not mentioned by Tolkien but usually implied by the reader: we presume that elves have pointed ears in Tolkien's writing because it is made evident in later, Tolkien-derived texts. In Tolkien's texts, the androgyny of the males is mainly inferred by the reader, while Paolini makes it explicit ('Though all four were male').¹⁴ The pointed ears as hallmark for elvishness have become increasingly essential in Heroic Fantasy and are mentioned in all texts discussed in this chapter, although curiously absent from the film version of *Eragon*, along with any reference to elves.¹⁵ In the film, Arya talks about 'my people', without the mention of the 'e-word'. Both these phenomena can also be observed in the film version of Gaiman's *Stardust*: there are no mentions of fairies and Faerie – the realm behind the Wall is called Stormhold and its ruling family seems quite human.¹⁶ The reason might be the popularity of the *Lord of the Rings* films which seem to have firmly manifested the look of the Tolkienian elf, and avoiding the pointed ears would also be to avoid accusations of paraphrasing, something at least Gaiman has professed to attempt.¹⁷

Though many of Paolini's names of persons and places are Tolkienian, he does make reference to other traditions relating to elves. Eragon is sometimes addressed by the name *Argetlam*, said to be 'an elven word that was used to refer to the Riders. It means "silver hand"'.¹⁸ The word is an adaptation of the Irish *Airgetlám* with the same meaning, used as an attribute of Nuadha, king of the Tuatha De Danann.¹⁹ Furthermore, the mace of the dwarf king Hrothgar is called Volund, and Nuala is mentioned as the name of an elvish writer.²⁰ It

¹⁴ Paolini, *Eldest*, p. 167.

¹⁵ *Eragon*, Stefan Fangmeier, dir., Fox, 2006.

¹⁶ *Stardust*, Matthew Vaughn, dir., Paramount, 2007.

¹⁷ 'The mid-1920s seemed like a time when people enjoyed writing those sorts of things, before there were fantasy trilogies and books "in the great tradition of *The Lord of the Rings*".' Gaiman, 'Happily Ever After'.

¹⁸ Paolini, *Eragon*, p. 426.

¹⁹ MacKillop *sub* 'Nuadu Airgetlám'.

²⁰ Paolini, *Eragon*, p. 441; Paolini, *Eldest*, p. 395.

is evident that Paolini has some knowledge of mythological elves although this is shown in the use of words rather than in the appearance and behaviour of his elves. When Eragon travels to the forest of Du Weldenvarden where the elves live, he thinks to himself, 'I've stepped into fairyland',²¹ and upon meeting the elves, 'The Fair Folk indeed',²² who are later said to possess 'fey magic'.²³ Paolini is here making reference to the possible knowledge of fairies on the part of the reader rather than a being or realm within the world of the text: none of these are mentioned. As the *Inheritance Cycle* can be seen as a primer of Tolkienian fantasy, it is possible that the young reader has little or no knowledge of Tolkienian elves, but has perhaps some knowledge of fairies, and the use of the above mentioned wording would indicate at least that these are a magical people inhabiting a magical realm. The references to fairies in texts that so overtly use Tolkienian elves further indicates Paolini's function as a summariser of popular perceptions of elves by a young writer to young readers and someone who also works to bridge the gap between the diminutive or dwarvish elf or fairy from fairy tales and children's books, and the human-sized Tolkienian elf of adult fantasy.

iv. Shannara series

Paolini's predecessor in the role as reiterator of conventions of Fantasy elves is Terry Brooks, who has been publishing books about the land of Shannara since 1977, using many of the same ideas that are reiterated in the *Inheritance Cycle*. The main focus is on the elven inheritance in the Ohmsford family, beginning with Shea Ohmsford in *The Sword of Shannara*:

He stared intently at Shea, his deep, shaded eyes running quickly over the young man's slim countenance and slight build. He noted the telltale Elven features immediately — the hint of slightly pointed ears beneath the tousled blond hair, the

²¹ Paolini, *Eldest*, p. 214.

²² Paolini, *Eldest*, p. 223.

²³ Paolini, *Eldest*, p. 385.

pencil-like eyebrows that ran straight up at a sharp angle from the bridge of the nose rather than across the brow, and the slimness of the nose and jaw.²⁴

Shea's father was an elf while his mother was of the Ohmsford family, and Shea is adopted after his mother's death by her relative Curzad Ohmsford, a widower with a son called Flick of the same age as Shea. This setup is re-used by Paolini, who makes Eragon an orphan and raised by his widower uncle Garrow as the brother of his cousin Roran. In both cases, the more elvish of the 'brothers' is singled out as the Chosen One. Brooks motivates his clearly Tolkienian style by saying,

We are creatures of habit and seek the familiar and comfortable. Why should writers be any different? There is room for innovation and expansion, but that isn't the way writers usually start out. As with most things, we take the paths others have taken until we are comfortable enough with the journey to blaze a few trails of our own.²⁵

To Brooks, the genre of fantasy seems to be 'familiar and comfortable', whilst the genre is based on an otherworldly setting and featuring non-human characters. The reiteration of conventions by writers of Heroic Fantasy, then, might be due to fear of alienating the reader, which would also motivate the use of elves. It is, however, not essential to keep so close to Tolkien's style in order to attract a readership. Two series of texts identified as being 'in the great tradition of *The Lord of the Rings*'²⁶ are the *Death Gate Cycle* by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, and the *Deverry Cycle* by Katharine Kerr. While the texts present beings and worlds that fulfil the expectations on Heroic Fantasy by readers, the elves are adapted much further than Paolini's and Brooks'.

v. *Death Gate Cycle*

The elves of the *Death Gate Cycle* possess advanced technology which is used to point out their superiority over mortals as many other peoples can master magic. The series features

²⁴ Terry Brooks, *The Sword of Shannara*, in *The Sword of Shannara Trilogy* (London: Orbit, 2004), pp. 7-431 (p. 16).

²⁵ Terry Brooks, *Sometimes the Magic Works: Lessons From a Writing Life* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2003), pp. 190-91.

²⁶ Gaiman, 'Happily Ever After'.

among other peoples the conventional set of elves, dwarves and humans, henceforth abbreviated to the three kindreds, to use Tolkien's term.²⁷ The first part *Dragonwing* is set in Arianus, the Realm of Sky, where the main reason for conflict between the three kindreds is the lack of water. The dwarves of Arianus, called Gegs, work with producing water, which is then taken by the elves, who are worshipped as gods by the Gegs. The elves of the text are said to have 'cared nothing about the Gegs. Humans were beasts. The Gegs were insects.'²⁸ This animosity between the three kindreds is mutual and continues in the second part *Elven Star*, where the dwarf Drugar's opinion about elves is expressed:

He hated them, hated their skinny bodies, their clean-shaven faces; hated their smell, their superiority; hated their tallness.²⁹

Elven Star is more 'elf-centred' than *Dragonwing* as it is set in their home world of Pryan, Realm of Fire, and presents the problem of making the reader sympathise with a people already described as superior and mostly malignant. The writers have partly solved this by 'humanising' the main elvish characters of the Quindiniar family - eccentric inventor father Lenthian, prudish older sister Calandra, clueless brother Paithan, and flirtatious younger sister Aleatha - while still stating that they have human slaves as servants, which they mistreat. The reader's possible prejudices about elves as superior are rectified by the somewhat less superior behaviour of Paithan Quindiniar when he finds himself in a 'fellowship' with a dwarf, Drugar, and a human man and woman, Roland and Rega, but also because of the other two males treat Paithan with as much disdain as any elf has done with the other kindreds previously. Weis and Hickman also contribute with some practical considerations about how the three kindreds relate to each other in matters of love, exemplified by the relationship between the Paithan and Rega:

²⁷ Tolkien, *Towers*, p. 14.

²⁸ Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, *Death Gate Cycle 1: Dragonwing* (London: Bantam, 1991), p. 288.

²⁹ Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, *Death Gate Cycle 2: Elven Star* (London: Bantam Spectra, 1991), p. 178.

You marry. You are both outcasts. He can't go home, you can't either. Your love is barren, for elves and humans can't reproduce. You wander the world in loneliness, years pass. You grow old and haggard, while he remains young and vital...³⁰

While many fictions that feature both elves and humans have plotlines based on their ability to interbreed, Weis and Hickman depart from this setup and therefore also from Tolkien.

Weis and Hickman do humorously make reference to Tolkien, for example with a comment about dwarf women being bearded as they are in Tolkien's texts,³¹ and the following words of wisdom from the wizard Zifnab which refers to Gandalf:

'Don't meddle in the affairs of wizards [...] for they are subtle and quick to anger.' A fellow sorcerer said that. Good at his job, knew a lot about jewelry. Not bad at fireworks, either.³²

There are further parallels in *Death Gate Cycle* to *The Lord of the Rings* in that it also pretends to be a found manuscript and is subsequently footnoted and supplied with appendices much like Tolkien's text, a step beyond the obligatory map and glossary of Heroic Fantasy.

vi. *Deverry Cycle*

A similar claim of authenticity is present in the *Deverry Cycle* by Katharine Kerr, as it is presented as having been written by a Deverrian author called Cadda Cerrmor,³³ who says in the pronunciation guide to *A Time of Exile*,

In my approximations I have, as before, relied upon native speakers of Elvish in difficult or ambiguous cases; I trust their judgment will eventually carry the day even in academic circles and that this tedious debate in the back pages of various linguistic journals will at last be put to rest.³⁴

The debate refers to Cadda Cerrmor's ongoing argument with an unnamed 'Elvish scholar of Elvish' at the University of Aberwyn in Deverry which resulted in a lawsuit that delayed the

³⁰ Weis and Hickman, *Elven Star*, pp. 131-32.

³¹ Weis and Hickman, *Elven Star*, p. 31.

³² Weis and Hickman, *Elven Star*, p. 114.

³³ Kerr at her website, <<http://www.deverry.com/old.html>>, accessed 1 February 2009.

³⁴ Katharine Kerr, *A Time of Exile (Deverry Cycle)* (London: Grafton, 1991), unnumbered page.

following book *A Time of Omens*.³⁵ This joke was taken seriously by some of Kerr's fans, who did not see the difficulty in summoning an elvish scholar of elvish from Deverry to an American court of law.³⁶ The four books in the section of the *Deverry Cycle* known as the *Westlands Cycle* are focussed on the elves, also called Westfolk, the People, and Elcyion Lacar. In Kerr's writing, there are elves and there are *elves*. The ones called Westfolk, who feature most prominently, are 'out-elvished' by an even more noble type called the Guardians. These are regarded by the Westfolk much like elves have been regarded by humans in folklore, as 'spirits rather than incarnate beings' who however insist that they 'belong to the People'.³⁷ Kerr makes reference to folklore by making the Guardians averse to iron (while the Westfolk use it), and Welsh mythology, as the Guardians ride white horses with red ears (cf. the white, red-eared dogs of Annwn that follow Gwyn ap Nudd).³⁸ The Guardians are led by King Evandar, whose name is picked up by Paolini and attributed to the late elf-king and Arya's father.³⁹ The Guardians, then, are the über-elves of Deverry, and can be compared to the High Ones of the *Elfquest* comic. Kerr does seem to draw on the comic as the Westfolk use the expression 'round-ears' for humans, elves of both Westfolk and Guardian stock can change into the form of animals, and the Westfolk use a lodestone (a magnetic stone used as a compass) – all of which are also found in the comic. The roles of the Westfolk and the Guardians are, however, the reverse from those of the dwarvish elf tribes and the High Ones in *Elfquest*. In the *Deverry Cycle*, it is the elevated, insubstantial type that is described as the more primitive, as Evandar says,

³⁵ Kerr at her news group, <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/KatharineKerr/message/33150>>, posted 24 March 2004, accessed 1 February 2009.

³⁶ Kerr at her website, <<http://www.deverry.com/old.html>>, accessed 1 February 2009.

³⁷ Kerr, *A Time of Exile*, p. 132.

³⁸ Kerr, *A Time of Exile*, p. 132 and p. 133.

³⁹ Evandar's daughter is called Elessario, while both are descended in name from an Elven king in Terry Brooks' *Shannara* series called Eventine Elessedil more directly than from Tolkien.

'I think...I think...' He looked up, but he stared over her shoulder at the sky. 'I think we were meant to be like you, but we stayed behind, somehow. Truly, I think that's it. We stayed behind. Somehow.'⁴⁰

Evandar's almost infantile style of expression contributes to the identification of the Guardians as the more capricious sort of elf found in folklore and mythology. The *Deverry Cycle* incorporate Celtic, primarily Welsh, influences, and Kerr acknowledges on her website that

Evandar and his people are the race of beings that the Irish call the Sidhe and the Scots, the Seelie Court, and they live in the place that the Welsh (who also speak of them) call Annwn, the not-world, the otherlands.⁴¹

Kerr thus manages to 'humanise' the viewpoint presented by the Westfolk by identifying them as the more practical sort of elves, while the Guardians fulfil the role of an elevated race. Weis and Hickman place Paithan in the context of a fellowship where he has the chance to prove his worth, but the writers' appeal to the reader's sympathy is not entirely successful as the elf-arrogance is continually excused and seen as natural behaviour for their kind.

vii. Lords and Ladies

The superior attitude of the elves is then present in many modern Fantasy texts as it is now often considered an essential quality. However, elf-arrogance is usually not criticised in post-Tolkienian Fantasy, and not at all in Tolkien's own writing. Tolkien omits one of the most important features of elves in folklore, namely their dangerous and capricious nature. This is, however, remembered by Terry Pratchett in *Lords and Ladies*, which is at once a parody of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Tolkien's writing, and folklore featuring elves and fairies.

Pratchett's *Discworld* series generally parodies the genre of Heroic Fantasy:

Originally I just wanted to write a sort of antidote to some of the worst kinds of post-Tolkien fantasy, what I call the 'Belike, he will wax wrath' school of writing. I wanted the world to be fantastic but the people to be as realistic as possible.⁴²

⁴⁰ Kerr, *A Time of Exile*, p. 136.

⁴¹ Kerr at her website, <<http://www.deverry.com/student.html#deverry>>, accessed 1 February 2009.

⁴² Terry Pratchett in Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction* (London; New York: Continuum, 2001), p. 32.

Lords and Ladies is one of the *Discworld* books based in the small kingdom of Lancre, where King Verence is about to marry the witch Magrat Garlick. Magrat is the youngest of a trio of witches, the other two being Granny Weatherwax and Nanny Ogg, who are first featured in *Weird Sisters*, Pratchett's take on *Macbeth*. The elves are here released from their realm into Lancre by some naïve young witches, and the Elf Queen pursues to abduct the groom-to-be, Verence. The problem is that most knowledge about the elves and their true nature has been forgotten:

You said: The Shining Ones. You said: The Fair Folk. And you spat, and touched iron. But generations later, you forgot about the spitting and the iron, and you forgot why you used those names for them, and you remembered only that they were beautiful.⁴³

The elves of the *Discworld* are as beautiful and noble as any stock fantasy elf, but genuinely evil.

The warriors must have been more than two meters tall. They did not wear clothes so much as items strung together – scraps of fur, bronze plates, strings of multi-coloured feathers. [...] their hair massed around their heads like a halo, thick with grease.⁴⁴

The Queen and King are not named, while their third-in-command is called Lord Lankin.

This is another ballad character usually named Long Lankin (Child has Lamkin) who fulfils the particular function of elves in ballads by being a threatening non-human man who prays on women and children.⁴⁵ Pratchett's elves are cruel for fun, and their power comes from convincing others that they are weak.⁴⁶ Pratchett's Elf King is big, bad and horned, and seems to be an interpretation of Oberon as King of Shadows. He can in fact not pass beyond the doorway of his underground realm, but instead sends out an image of himself to put the

⁴³ Terry Pratchett, *Lords and Ladies* (London: Corgi, 1993), p. 136.

⁴⁴ Pratchett, p. 142. Cf. the indolent and raggedly dressed fairy warriors in Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*, pp. 639-40.

⁴⁵ Child, pp. 320-41.

⁴⁶ Pratchett, p. 348.

queen right, which he does by uttering ‘something about meeting by moonlight’.⁴⁷ Pratchett is here indicating that the dangerous elf often found in folklore has been overshadowed by the popularity of the Tolkienian elf whose superiority is excused and accepted. While Tolkien implies that when Elves go bad, they turn into Orcs, Pratchett points out that it is their beauty and nobility in particular that makes them bad and gives them the power to be forgiven for it.

viii. The Legend of Drizzt

A series of books that features a version of the elf halfway between Tolkienian Elf and Orc is R. A. Salvatore’s *The Legend of Drizzt*. The ‘hero’ Drizzt Do’Urden and his fellow dark elves are physically dark, which is clearly not what Tolkien means by the expression Dark-elf. *The Legend of Drizzt* is thrice-removed from Tolkien’s writing, as it is set in a world based on the campaign environment *Forgotten Realms* in the fantasy role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons* which in turn features beings and worlds inspired by, or mostly adapted from, Tolkien’s writing. By using the alternative name *drow*, the writers of *Forgotten Realms* are making reference to a being found in the folklore of the Shetland Islands called *drow*, *trow* or *dreugh*. The name is adapted from the Scandinavian *troll*, but was used as a general name for a supernatural being in the same manner as ‘fairy’ has been used elsewhere in Britain.⁴⁸ In none of the examples given by Keightley are the trows more malicious than elves and fairies in general and they do not have black skin, although they do live underground or in the sea.⁴⁹ By invoking the name of a being out of folklore, the writers are claiming some authenticity for their creation, rather than drawing it straight out of Tolkien’s world. This has given rise to the belief that the being invented by the writers of *Forgotten Realms* is adapted from the trows out of Shetlandic folklore, and that there truly has existed, or still exist, elves of the

⁴⁷ Pratchett, p. 350.

⁴⁸ Keightley pp. 164-71.

⁴⁹ Keightley pp. 164-71.

same appearance as stereotypical fantasy elves but with black skin, white hair, and a foul disposition.⁵⁰

The drow (as I will refer to them to separate them from both Tolkien's creation and folklore) of *Forgotten Realms* live in the underground realm of Menzoberranzan, where they claim to have been forced to flee from persecution by the light elves, also called faeries. All evil that the drow experience is projected onto these surface-dwelling faeries, in a reversal of most fantasy fictions that ascribe evil to dark (often physically so) beings. Drizzt Do'Urden is, however, set apart from the other drow in the narrative because of his goodness and his disbelief in the evil of faeries. This is demonstrated when he is sent out to the surface with a party whose instructions are to raid a camp of the faeries. These are found to be behaving like one would expect then to, dancing and singing around a fire at night, completely unarmed:

Surface elves were the most alert of all races, and a human – or even a sneaky halfling – would have had little chance of catching them unawares.

The raiders this night were drow, more skilled in stealth than the most proficient alley thief. Their footfalls went unheard, even across beds of dry, fallen leaves, and their crafted armor, shaped perfectly to the contours of their slender bodies, bent with their movements without a rustle. Unnoticed, they lined the perimeter of the small glade, where a score of faeries danced and sang.⁵¹

The Tolkienian references are here obvious: that elves can walk without footfall is one of the first things about them that the reader is informed of in *The Lord of the Rings*.⁵² The mention of halflings further enforces the connection between *Forgotten Realms* and Middle-earth,⁵³ and the scene itself mirrors that which Bilbo and the dwarves see in Mirkwood.⁵⁴ Salvatore does set out to challenge the perception of elves that a reader of Tolkien might have: here, it is the dark, sinister, subterranean people who are *us*, and the beautiful faeries who are set out as the enemies. Tolkien does offer some sinister elves in *The Silmarillion* – Eöl, Maeglin and

⁵⁰ See for example <<http://www.darkelf.org>> for a demonstration of this belief.

⁵¹ R. A. Salvatore, *The Legend of Drizzt: Homeland* (Renton, WA: Wizards of the Coast, 2004), p. 241.

⁵² Tolkien, *Fellowship*, p. 107.

⁵³ The word hobbit was initially used in *Dungeons and Dragons* but was changed to halfling after a legal challenge from the Tolkien estate. The being remains very similar to Tolkien's creation.

⁵⁴ Tolkien, *Hobbit*, p. 142.

Fëanor, for example – but these are never identified as foes in the text at the same level as Morgoth's servants. Elves will have to become nameless and faceless Orcs to be properly evil, and have thus become different beings altogether: their acceptance of evil distorts their fair features into monstrous forms, and they are clearly no longer elves. The perception that elves are naturally good and the excusal of elf-arrogance are the main elements that separate Tolkien's elves from the being in folklore and mythology, and one that writers who want to incorporate 'Tolkienian' elves would have to consider carefully.

ix. The role of elves in modern Fantasy

Another factor that should be considered when evaluating the impact of Tolkien's elves is that later fantasy writers tend to make use of the types of elves featured in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* rather than *The Silmarillion*. There are several reasons for this: firstly, *The Silmarillion* is less extensively read by fantasy readers and writers prefer to use the more popular and familiar version presented in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. Secondly, most modern fantasy writers never delve as deep into the language, culture and history of their invented world as Tolkien did, and therefore make reference to more superficial features of elves such as physical features, dress, magic abilities, and in general details that are essential for the story. Tolkien is significantly different from modern fantasy writers in that he prioritised the deeper elements of the culture of the elves as more important than the more superficial, so his main interest is in the language and history of the elves rather than what most readers would desire to know more of, such as their appearance and everyday life. This leads on to a third reason why *The Silmarillion* is not commonly referred to by modern fantasy writers: it is simply too elf-centred. Writers of Tolkienian fantasy in general prefer to incorporate several races in their narratives because of the variety it facilitates. Tom Shippey criticises the style of *The Silmarillion* by saying that it 'can never be anything other than hard to read', and asserts that it would probably not have been published without the prior success

of *The Lord of the Rings*.⁵⁵ Davies suggests one reason why even avid Tolkien readers dislike *The Silmarillion* is that the amount of memorisation that the story requires is more befitting the audience in an oral culture than impatient modern readers.⁵⁶ While the idea of retelling myths, both those referring to existing traditions and completely invented ones, in Fantasy fiction has been used extensively, the format and style of *The Silmarillion* have had marginal effects on the genre. Tolkien himself described it as

Full of mythology and elvishness, and all that 'heigh stile' (as Chaucer might say), which has been so little to the taste of many reviewers.⁵⁷

The style can then be parodied as the original to the 'Belike, he will wax wroth' school, to use Pratchett's expression. *The Silmarillion* is a profoundly elf-centred text, and given the elves' long lifespans and elevated nature, the story becomes quite uninteresting to many readers. Tolkien motivated this Elvish view by saying,

We cannot write stories *about* Elves, whom we do not know inwardly; and if we try we simply turn Elves into men.⁵⁸

One can discern from this comment that in *The Silmarillion*, the narration is done by an Elvish scribe, in contrast to the Hobbit-centred transcription of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* by Bilbo and Frodo, which might explain the style of the text. Another problem with this elf-centred view is that the reader does not get the outsider's view like in the other two texts, where the two Hobbit protagonists marvel and learn from their human, Elvish and Dwarvish companions. At least in the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, the three kindreds are of equal importance, which is not what happens in *The Silmarillion*. Because of the amount of Elves in the text, it not only becomes hard to tell them apart, there are also most of the time not enough non-elvish characters to compare them to. Elves are only elvish enough when

⁵⁵ T. A. Shippey, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 261.

⁵⁶ Lin Davies, "'Elvish and Heroic': Can we Love *The Silmarillion*?", *Amon Hen* 206 (July 2007), 20-23 (pp. 20-21).

⁵⁷ Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 238 (183, notes on W. H. Auden's review of *The Return of the King*, 1956).

⁵⁸ Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 285n2 (212, draft of a continuation of a letter to Rhona Beare, 1958).

compared to mortals, and this is why they work best in fellowships and other gatherings, and as supporting characters rather than protagonists. Fantasy writers who want to incorporate 'Tolkienian' elves therefore have the choice of tackling the elf-problem by either humanising them by making them flawed, as most of the writes discussed in this chapter do, or by criticising the elf-arrogance, as Pratchett does.

The popular perception of elves has been fundamentally changed by Tolkien's writing and the dangerous nature of elves and fairies in folklore is often forgotten, even by writers and artists who make use of folklore sources. It seems as though the modern Fantasy elf is as much a literary being as one from traditional narratives. It is not even essential for modern Fantasy writers to make any reference to belief if they are writing in the Tolkienian tradition where the elf is featured alongside humans, dwarves and perhaps other humanoids, in a completely fantastic world. It is, however, significant that the elf-character retains its contemporary appearance even in fictions that refer back to a being once believed in: the Significant Other is a character constantly in flux, being adapted and features included or excluded to suit the writer's needs. The elf-character in modern Fantasy is then most often not an Other to humans, found in an Otherworld adjacent to the mundane world, but one of a number of different beings. This might perhaps be linked to the conformity of the appearance and behaviour of the elf-character in modern Fantasy: an elf needs certain features to be recognisable as an elf, as discussed above. The great variety of fantastic beings that is found in the realm of Faerie in some narratives perhaps corresponds to the dwarves, halflings, magicians and other beings that are now stock characters in modern Fantasy. One might say that the completely fantastic worlds where these fictions are set correspond to Faerie, even if there is no clearly defined mundane world within the text. However, protagonists in modern Fantasy tend to come from prosaic backgrounds, often agricultural communities where stories of elves and all manner of beings are told but the beings themselves not commonly seen.

When the protagonist then sets out on his adventure and meets elves, they tend to fill the function of showing the protagonist that there is a greater world beyond what s/he knows, full of magic and knowledge that s/he is allowed to take part of. In this way the modern Fantasy protagonist is just another version of the Chosen One, while the fantastic realm no longer belongs to or is ruled by the noble elves. Downgrading the noble elves to one people out of many that inhabit the fantastic realm means that while arrogant, they do not decide the fate of the Chosen One and can thereby be appreciated for adding an element of glamour to the story. There are, however, still modern Fantasy texts where the elves are the Others that rule the Otherworld and retain their arrogance, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 13: The Escape to Reality

i. Contemporary attitudes to elves and fairies

The texts discussed in this chapter are in very diverse media yet all encapsulate the contemporary condition of the elf figure.¹ Whether this image is presented through books, games, the internet, film, or simply belief, they have in common that while it is further altered and adapted from earlier versions, it is simultaneously re-historicised: it is made to fit into an imagined continuum. This type of elf is of the Gentry-type and mostly indebted to Tolkien, yet while the modern Fantasy texts that exemplified the Tolkienian elf in the previous chapter either acknowledged this or borrowed enough material to make it obvious, the source is here most of the time erased and/or denied. Instead there is an appeal to a continuum of the modern Fantasy elf and the argument is that the Tuatha de Danann, álfar, and so on, in reality looked and acted just like the modern Fantasy elf, being a tall, beautiful being with pointed ears who is averse to iron. The call to authenticity is key: what matters is not if one can cite scholarly sources to support one's case, but how genuine your argument looks to a layperson. This indiscriminate blend of traditions is mainly due to the nature of the source material used by these writers and contributors:² elves and fairies are as popular as ever and there is a wide variety of sources containing everything from thoroughly researched to entirely fabricated materials to call on for verification of any perception of elves and fairies.

One example of this is the vocabulary used in these fictions: the being is often referred to as a *faery*, while its properties are *elfin*. When asked on her website about her use of the word *faery*, the writer Melissa Marr claims that

actually, 'faeries' is a correct spelling. 'Fairy Tales' are different than 'faery tales,' so too are 'fairies' and 'faeries.' It's not an attempt to be...umm, *wrong* or clever or whatever. It's about the folklore.³

¹ I will refer to all types of writing discussed in this chapter as texts, whether they are fictional or not.

² I will use the term 'contributors' to refer to those who write on websites and forums.

³ Melissa Marr, blog entry, 21 March 2009, <<http://melissa-writing.livejournal.com/?skip=20>>, accessed 28 May 2009.

The use of the obsolete spelling has become a way of disassociating oneself from diminutive flower fairies, and thus gives the writer more freedom to adapt the character to suit her/his needs. Curiously, the words faery and elfin are not frequently used in folklore, where the character is most often referred to by euphemisms, but were instead popularised by Edmund Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*. The contemporary meaning of the word 'faerie' is explained in the *OED*:

In present usage, it is practically a distinct word, adopted either to express Spenser's peculiar modification of the sense, or to exclude various unpoetical or undignified associations connected with the current form *fairy*.⁴

Elfin is also used to refer to a genuinely folkloric character, despite the fact that the word was invented by Spenser. Tolkien's word *elven* is sometimes used as a synonym, while the oldest and most general word *elvish* is rarely used in contemporary texts. Some distinction does exist in popular use: all of the post-Tolkienian writers discussed in the last chapter use *elven*, which can be taken as a sign that the Tolkienian source is acknowledged. Parallels between this modern meaning and that of Spenser are appropriate, because the purpose is much the same: to at once use words that allude to familiar beings yet to adapt the spelling to mean something different. *The Faerie Queene* is a mock-medieval outing where history is adapted to the moral and aesthetic sentiment of the time of its composition, not all that unlike a modern Heroic Fantasy novel. The beings and sentiments are presented as correctly historical, supported primarily by the accounting of the history of Faerie through the chronicle '*Antiquitee of Faery lond*'. The modern elf is provided a past by carefully selecting and bending earlier references to the character, and by pure fabulation. This process is best demonstrated by the web-based Elenari, as discussed below. An intermediate step between distinct characters in their original context and the degree of conflation that has produced the

⁴ *OED sub* 'Faerie, faery'.

modern image of the elf is a form of narrative that will here be called *collage*. Some collage narratives have already been discussed in this thesis, for example Gaiman's *Sandman* series and the film *Hellboy II: the Golden Army*. In a collage narrative, human-sized elves are usually grouped together as the 'master-race' of the supernatural world, while they might look and act differently. Below them are various other beings that might originate in different traditions, and all beings usually retain the qualities they have in their original context even if they are found outside of it in the narrative.

ii. Faerie Tale

A significant example of collage narrative is Raymond E. Feist's *Faerie Tale*.⁵ As in Gaiman's *American Gods*, the plot revolves around the beings brought to the United States by immigrants from different parts of Europe. Feist's narrative limits the scope to 'fairy' beings and the countries of origin to Germany, Ireland and Scandinavia. The location is William Pitt Country in upstate New York to where the writer Phil Hastings and his family move from California. The area is as 'old' a place as can be found for Americans of European origin, and the modern, prosaic family find themselves exposed to beings that they know nothing about and definitely do not believe in. Luckily, the Hastings happen to have experts in the field at hand to explain the unusual events, namely the retired scholar Agatha Grant, the amateur historian Mark Blackman, and the local character Barney Doyle. The information they provide makes up a primer of elf and fairy knowledge presented in fictional form to an American readership. It is primarily the children of the family who are exposed to the various types of fairy folk. The twenty-year-old daughter Gabbie finds herself somewhat attracted to Wayland Smith when he appears to shoe her horse, and is later sexually assaulted by Puck. The eight-year-old twins Sean and Patrick observe a number of different fairy beings before the King himself abducts Patrick and leaves a changeling in his place. Feist's King is a

⁵ Raymond E. Feist, *Faerie Tale* [1988] (London: HarperVoyager, 2001).

conflation of many traditions: he is sometimes called the Erl King as the mound in which he resides is known as Erl King Hill, and also sometimes Oberon, but his proper name is given as *Amadán na Briona*. The name means 'the Fool of the Forth', in Feist's text abbreviated to 'the Fool', and is an obscure figure out of Irish folklore recorded only by Lady Gregory.⁶ The accounts in her collection mention him as a harbinger of death, a being that can change shape, and that he appears in the month of June instead of the usual axis point of May Day. *Faerie Tale* indeed begins in June, confirming Feist's use of Gregory as a source. Due to the lack of physical description of Amadán na Briona in Gregory's collection of accounts, Feist has borrowed some features of Gwyn ap Nudd, the corresponding figure in Wales in the role of mythical 'reaper man': The Fool is then white and shining, horned, and the leader of the Wild Hunt. He rules over the Dark Lands while the much more benevolent Queen governs the Bright Lands. The Fool has a servant, a teenage boy who is sometimes called Puck but claims that his proper name is Ariel, a conflation between *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. He also has a pet, a black scaly creature called the Bad Thing by Sean and Patrick, which is revealed to be what remains of the Indian Boy, which is why the King needs a new boy and abducts Patrick.

The collage narrative in *Faerie Tale* then summarises texts concerning elves and fairies from many different traditions, and while some beings, like the Fool, are conflated, Feist's references are mostly historically verified. Modern Fantasy with a basis in folklore has been discussed before in this thesis, for example Gaiman's *Stardust* and Clarke's *The Ladies of Grace Adieu*. For American writers of Fantasy who use folklore as a source it is even more important to prove that the fiction is *genuine*; it must point to a past tradition that is inevitably not rooted in the North American continent. One way of proving the authenticity of the

⁶ Lady Augusta Gregory, *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920). Chapter 13, 'The Fool of the Forth', accessed from the *Internet Sacred Texts Archive*, < <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/vbwi/vbwi14.htm> >, 17 June 2009.

tradition is to make the modern Americans in the text descended from countries where elves and fairies are found. Ireland is particularly favoured for this purpose, for example *Faerie Tale*'s Sean and Patrick and *Wicked Lovely*'s Aislinn (discussed below). The call to the authenticity of the Irish might explain Feist's use of the obscure name Amadán na Briona for his fairy king instead of more common ones like Oberon or the Erl King. As already mentioned in relation to Gaiman's *American Gods*, Americans would have no less a need for a visible past than people in the old world. American folklore is a tricky subject, but considering that what is known about European folk traditions was mostly collected and recreated around the turn of the last century, the difference might not be that great. Richmond specifies a folktale as something that is not necessarily rooted in the past but instead characterised by change and variation:

Thus, for an item to be folkloristic it must show some form of continuity; it must be recognizable as itself while at the same time it must reflect the effect of imprecise – imprecise, not necessarily imperfect – transmission. Thus, in one way at least, modern American folklorists are concerned with tradition. They deal with recurrent forms.⁷

The collage narrative might be a particularly suitable format for American Fantasy as the writer can then on the one hand feature a variety of beings from different traditions while at the same time conform to modern American perceptions of them. There is, however, still a problem with differentiating between the modern American perception of the elf as a being of belief and as a literary character. There simply is no difference anymore, but the amount of variation on the same theme involving the Gentry-type might allow it to qualify as modern folklore. This adaptability is part of the appeal of the elf in modern fiction: an elf or fairy can be made to look and act in a wide range of ways, within limits, and still be connected to a continuum.

iii. 'Fae Lit'

⁷ W. Edson Richmond, 'Introduction', in Richard M. Dorson, ed., *Handbook of American Folklore*, pp. xi-xix (p. xii).

The collage narrative is also the basis of a new form of Fantasy that, for want of a better word, I will call Fae Lit. This is faery romance for women and girls, a cross-over between Fantasy and Chick Lit, belonging to a subgenre sometimes called Paranormal Romance.⁸ While vampire romance, Bit Lit, at present is the most popular form, Paranormal Romance would allow for many types of supernatural beings to be the lover interest of the protagonist woman or girl. The young adult fiction of Melissa Marr is marketed as 'faerie romance' and meant to appeal to the same readership as the young adult Bit Lit *Twilight*.⁹ Fae Lit can also be classified as Urban Fantasy, as the plots take place in a modern, urban environment, and the folkloristic elements are adapted to that context, hence fact about fairies and other beings are explained via the human characters' reading of folkloristic books and fairy tales. While the plot of *Faerie Tale* revolves around the clash between the mundane world and the magical, *real* one, which the disbelieving modern Americans are disinclined to accept, the situation is rather different in Fae Lit. Here, the Otherworld also protrudes into the mundane world, but the difference is in the nature of the protagonists: the Chosen One does not enter Fairyland in Fae Lit. Instead, she sees that the real world is populated by a variety of magical beings. In contrast to the texts discussed in chapter 10, there is no border between the Otherworld and the real world in Supernatural Romance: anyone you meet in the street can be an elf, fairy, angel, vampire, or something else entirely. In a Fae Lit narrative, *Faerie Tale*'s Gabbie Hastings would have reacted to the romantic advances of Wayland and Puck with delight more than fear. Feist describes her feelings about them as mixed, but she, as a fictional character from the 1980s, is not yet ready to be the strong female protagonist of later Fae Lit.

⁸ For the Chick Lit genre, see Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young, eds, *Chick Lit: the New Woman's Fiction* (New York; London: Routledge, 2006). For an outline of Paranormal Romance, see <<http://www.paranormalromance.org>>.

⁹ Melissa Marr, *Wicked Lovely* (London: HarperCollins, 2007), front cover.

The protagonist of Melissa Marr's *Wicked Lovely* is Aislinn, a teenage girl with second sight who is romantically pursued by Keenan, King of the Summer Court. For the purpose of historically grounding the beings in the text each chapter is headed with quotations from scholarly books on folklore – Kirk, Keightley, Evans-Wentz, Yeats, Lady Wilde and more. While the beings in these different sources are conflated to create one, or at least one category, Marr limits her faeries to the 'Celtic' sort, and the quotations given are only those that deal with fairies in Celtic areas. Aislinn's Irish origin is also the main reason why she has second sight, handed down from her grandmother: she is genetically predisposed for it and her Celticism makes her 'genuine'. The first quotation given by Marr is from Robert Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth*, and presented like this:

SEERS, or Men of the SECOND SIGHT, ... have very terrifying encounters with [the FAIRIES they call *Sleagh Maith*, or the Good People]¹⁰

Compare this with the unedited passage:

And at such revolution of time, seers or men of the second sight (females being but seldom so qualified) have very terrifying experiences of them, even on highways;¹¹

Had the quotation been inserted in its original form, the plot of Aislinn and her grandmother having second sight would have seemed inauthentic: it would have looked like Marr had adapted the tradition of male seers and modernised it to apply to females, and that it would therefore not be genuinely traditional. By altering the reference, Marr is moulding the readers' perception of the tradition and making it seem in line with what happens in the plot. This is the process that reoccurs throughout contemporary writing on elves and fairies: by careful selection and alteration of references, the modern image of elves and fairies seems authentic. Marr, as well as Feist, divides the faeries into a Summer Court and a Winter Court while Fae Lit writers Holly Black and Laurell K. Hamilton use the words Seelie and Unseelie Court to make the same division. Distinction between good and bad faeries has

¹⁰ Robert Kirk in Marr, p. 9.

¹¹ Kirk, p. 7.

become a trope in Urban Fantasy, but it is rarely found in folklore. The words Seelie and Unseelie come from Scottish Gaelic but the use has become universally accepted as being true and genuine. Because these words are so rarely mentioned in folklore and the Shetlandic word Drow has become a synonym for Unseelie (see chapter 12), the division should be seen as having been formed in modern Fantasy rather than folklore. It was popularised through the role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons* in the 1970s.¹² Ruling over the Unseelie Court is the Queen of Air and Darkness, originally T. H. White's name for Morgause in *The Once and Future King*. She here has no personal name but appears to be much the same as the *Dungeons and Dragons* character in Hamilton's Fae Lit fiction, where she bears the name Andais and is the aunt of the protagonist Merry Gently.¹³

iv. Fairies and femininity

In contrast to Marr's young adult fiction, the Merry Gently books are directed to a distinctly adult audience because of the erotic content. In keeping with the collage narratives, the faery princess Merry has a number of lovers of many different faery species to choose from, and her erotic adventures are the main catalyst of the plots. The process of re-marketing fairies for adult women rather than girls demands further investigation as most of the development has occurred outside the discipline of literature. One source that would be of significance to American women would be the Reclaiming movement. This was started as a feminist Wiccan community in San Francisco in 1980.¹⁴ Its founder, Starhawk, was at the time a follower of Faery Wicca (later renamed Feri Wicca to avoid conflation with other meanings of the word faery), a movement started by Victor and Cora Anderson and Gwyddion Pendderwen that

¹² See Gwendolyn F. M. Kestrel and Faith M. Pricef, 'Seelie and Unseelie Courts', *Wizards of the Coast*, <<http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=dnd/fe/20021213a>>, accessed 14 June 2009.

¹³ Laurell K. Hamilton, *A Kiss of Shadows* (London: Bantam, 2000), p. 76.

¹⁴ Joanne Pearson, *A Popular Dictionary of Paganism* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002) *sub* 'Reclaiming'. See also Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: a Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* [1979] (San Francisco; London: Harper & Row, 1999).

gained popularity during the 1970s, in particular with feminists.¹⁵ Starhawk claims that fairies accompanied witches who fled Europe for the Americas during the Renaissance witch craze, much the same argument as that put forth by Dorson in chapter III.11. and also Gaiman and Feist in fictional form.¹⁶ The thinking behind Faery Wicca and later Reclaiming is that while fairies of all shapes and sizes exist and can be seen by witches and other seers, they are all subject to the great goddess, Danu, of Tuatha de Danann fame. This is a way of joining up diminutive flower fairies that represent 'girly' qualities, and the mother goddess that appeals to adult, sexually liberated women, under the same heading: hence, there would not have to be a difference between beings representing properties attributed to women and 'real' beings, and women could choose from a variety, or collage, of beings to relate to. A second reason for the popularity of the fairy with adult women also originates in the 1970s and second wave feminism. The word *fairy* denotes 'frothy child-femininity', as Purkiss puts it,¹⁷ and feminist mothers wanted to resist pigeonholeing their daughters into a stereotypical gender role. Many of the 'alternative' British women surveyed by Holland in 2004 said that they wanted to dress up as fairies as little girls because it was denied to them because their feminist mothers dressed them in practical, Tomboy-type clothes.¹⁸ Purkiss agrees that

part of me yearned secretly for frills, tulle, lace, wings and a wand. At times, fairies seemed to stand for a luxuriant, seductive ultra-pink feminine power to which my mother denied me access.¹⁹

Post-feminists now have no problem dressing up their daughters as fairy princesses: from being the first anti-suffragette fairy, it seems that Tinker Bell and her cohort are as popular as ever. The pink fluffy fairy still has an adult fanbase through for example publications such as

¹⁵ Pearson *sub* 'Faery Wicca'. See also Cora Anderson, *Fifty Years in the Feri Tradition* (Walnut Creek, CA: Carnivallia, 2004).

¹⁶ Starhawk, p. 31.

¹⁷ Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, plate 25, opposite p. 165.

¹⁸ Samantha Holland, *Alternative Femininities: Body, Age and Identity* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004), pp. 54-55.

¹⁹ Purkiss, p. 3.

Faerie Magazine and the very similar Fae Magazine, and of course the internet.²⁰ Purkiss is rather wary of the pink fairy backlash, arguing that over-feminising children also sexualises them:

I am not saying that paedophiles get their jollies by looking at Flower Fairies [...] Nor am I saying that every old lady who buys a Flower Fairy book is a paedophile. What I am saying is that our consciousness of erotization of the cute child makes it impossible for us to contemplate these fairies comfortably.²¹

It is also perhaps significant that while 'fairy' denotes the ultra-feminine, it is also a slang term for male homosexual.²² Despite the efforts of feminists to make the fairy genuinely womanly rather than girly, the way that the word denotes performed femininity is unavoidable. Performed femininity is exemplified by Holland as

the use of exaggerated 'feminine' behaviour, such as pouting, shrieking, the batting of eyelashes – acting both childish and knowing. These traits, even when adopted by men, are instantly recognisable as being 'feminine' [.]²³

The variety of activities that women (and men) can indulge in in order to 'act out' their inner fairy are, as exemplified above, bountiful. It seems that there is a need for it: not only in the sense that the fairy represents ultra-femininity that can be acted, but also that it is a non-human being.

v. *Otherkin*

The matter of identifying with a non-human being has perhaps been found before, but it now seems completely acceptable not only to do so, but to act this identification out. Faery Balls are frequently organised in Britain and the United States where people get to be fairies for the night.²⁴ In neo-Pagan/New Age communities it would not be surprising to see people dressed up as magical beings at celebrations, not to mention the number of latex ears that would be

²⁰ See for example *Faerie Magazine*, <<http://www.faeriemagazine.com>>, *Fae Magazine*, <<http://www.faemagazine.com>>, and *My Faery Space*, <<http://www.myfaeryspace.com>>.

²¹ Purkiss, p. 310.

²² *OED* sub 'fairy', n. and a. 5.c. See also Purkiss, p. 314.

²³ Holland, p. 36.

²⁴ See for example <<http://www.3wishesfaeryfest.co.uk/faeryballs.htm>>, accessed 24 June 2010.

donned at gatherings of Tolkien fans. The greatest community of non-humans is, however, on the internet. There are a number of websites dedicated to people who consider themselves to be elves, and use the internet to share their experiences and stories of their origin. These internet-based elves are part of a larger community of people who believe themselves to be various non-human souls presently in human bodies, for example dragons, angels, demons, cats and other animals, who are known by the umbrella term Otherkin.²⁵ The oldest Web presence of Otherkin elves is the mailing list *Elfinkind Digest*, started in 1990.²⁶ The disclaimer sent out to members is demonstrative of the attitude present in the Otherkin community:

The Elfinkind Digest is NOT an exercise in role-playing. We are NOT gaming. This is NOT an in-progress RPG. We are NOT playing characters. We are NOT writing co-operative fiction. This is NOT intended to be an area of 'merged IC and OOC behaviour,' because THIS IS NOT A GAME.

We are quite serious about the reality of this matter. You do not have to believe in it, but you MUST believe that WE DO, and should behave accordingly.²⁷

The phenomenon has arisen at the point where role-playing/Fantasy fiction and New Age/Neo-pagan interests meet, and there is therefore a conflation between *appreciating*, *believing in* and *identifying with* elves and fairies, as outlined below. This is primarily a result of living in an age of mass information rather than having faulty perceptions, but it does produce a profoundly contradictory phenomenon: these genuine, original and natural elves are contained in a digital environment. This contradiction is, however, not evident to the contributors to these websites: the elves are nonetheless set out as emblems of the natural, magical state denied to modern humans except those who discover their natural state of non-humanity. The internet has then given these people a forum for acting out their true, inner

²⁵ For more elaboration on this term, see Tirl Windtree, 'What are Otherkin?', <<http://www.otherkin.net/articles/what.html>>, accessed 12 May 2009.

²⁶ *Elfinkind Digest*, < <http://www.murkworks.net/~elflist/>>, accessed 3 June 2009.

²⁷ R'ykandar Korra'ti, email sent from <elflist@newmoon.murkworks.net>, dated 11 June 2006, received 4 June 2009.

selves. Like the desire to dress up, for example as fairies, as discussed above, the phenomenon can beneficially be viewed in the light of Butler's theory of Performativity:

The figure of the interior soul understood as 'within' the body is signified through its inscription *on* the body, even though its primary mode of signification is through its very absence, its potent invisibility. [...] In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause.²⁸

The administrators of *Elfinkind Digest* appeal to authenticity: 'we were Otherkin elves before it was fashionable'. The problem is that it then, in the late 1990s, became fashionable to be an elf. The reason was the publication of a role-playing game called *Changeling: the Dreaming*. Here, what seemed like ordinary humans were suddenly revealed to be elves, fairies and other beings:

Malcolm-Rannirl, the administrator of <http://www.otherkin.net/>, explains that the game did 'a reasonable job of drawing together various mythological components,' but that it also led to a fair number of 'wannabes' deciding they were elves when they were really just human geeks. Rich Dansky, a human being who worked on the game, ran into Otherkin through a listserv called darkfae-l. The game 'had just come out and there was apparently a rampaging debate on the list over how the folks at White Wolf had gotten so much of their existence right,' Dansky says. 'Finally, one of the list members came to the obvious conclusion that we'd gotten it right because we ourselves were in fact changelings.'²⁹

While the elves of the game are not identical to the image projected of the Otherkin elves, the game helped to spread the trend further. Elves are the biggest Otherkin subgroup, and a majority of them use the term Elenari to describe themselves. Websites such as *Elenari* and *Elven Realities*³⁰ are full of stories that outline what a real elf is and elaborate accounts of the history of the Elenari, while the contributors admit that

The word 'Elenari' was derived from Tolkien's Elvish and translates almost literally to 'The Elven People of/from the Stars.' This name was adopted because the Elenari

²⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* [1990] (New York; London: Routledge, 1999), p. 172.

²⁹ Nick Mamatas, 'Elven Like Me: Otherkin Come Out of the Closet', *The Village Voice*, 13 February 2001. Accessed from < <http://www.villagevoice.com/2001-02-13/news/elven-like-me>>, 18 May 2009.

³⁰ *Elenari*, <<http://www.elenari.net>>, *Elven Realities*, <<http://www.rialian.com/elves3.htm>>.

aren't certain what name or names they called themselves in their own language at different points in time.³¹

While Tolkien's Eldar might be partial to the stars, they are certainly not from them, while the *Elfquest* elves are, and contributors also make reference to 'The Way' to describe the traditional lifestyle of the Elenari.³² K'Llanya continues:

The Elenari are not the only race to have come to Earth from other places. As such, the Elenari may have been confused in myth with other non-native cultures, including the Tuatha de Dannan (*sic*). [...] The Elenari are not originally Fae and the Elenari Homeworlds were not Faery. The Shiri are the one exception we know of so far - they have always lived in Faery and are thus both Elenari and Fae.³³

From this can be discerned two things. Firstly, the Elenari are aliens. By referring to worlds rather than planets, the Elenari are removed from the Science Fiction perception of aliens and by invoking the Tuatha de Danann further connected to a tradition of elf belief. Secondly, the general treatment of elements of folklore and mythology in this text and others demonstrates that Elenari belief is not based on these sources and indeed has no connection to them, beginning with the fact that no people called Elenari, or any of the subgroups, or any people matching the description, is mentioned in such sources. By creating a 'new' race of elves, the contributors to the websites can ignore earlier beliefs and knowledge thereof, without being scrutinised by their peers:

Failure to be aware of this older body of lore or the culture in which it was a living part just 30 years ago will bring you and your knowledge under suspicion in many parts of the Wiccan and Neo-Pagan community. Now, if you are aware that you are dealing with a persona you put on and take off when you are not with fantasy role playing gatherings, if you are aware of the older body of lore with as much familiarity as the modern fantasy writings on the subject you may be able to add a great deal to the discussion of folkloric practices in your community.³⁴

³¹ K'Llayna, 'A FAQ list of the Elenari', November 2000. <<http://www.elenari.net/Elenari/Elenarifaq4.html>>, accessed 12 May 2009.

³² K'Llayna. 'The Way' is specified as 'The Wolfrider philosophy, traditions, and codes of behavior, derived from wolf pack law.' Wilkerson and Pini, eds, *The Big Elfquest Gatherum*, p. 369.

³³ K'Llayna.

³⁴ Tinne@eskimo.com, 'Older Folklore', November 2002. <<http://www.otherkin.net/harmonyDiscord/thoughts/folklore.html>>, accessed 19 May 2009.

It can therefore be concluded that identification with this fabulated race of elves is a step beyond role-playing, yet not removed from that genre. Some kind of division is therefore required:

- **Appreciation of elves and fairies**

There does not necessarily have to be a connection between the elf figure as presented in Fantasy literature, computer games or role-playing games, and the character out of folklore and mythology, although such a conflation is often made by people who appreciate both. People with an appreciation of elves and fairies might favour a particular version of the character, for example one out of a book, or have an all-round interest. It is quite common that 'fans' would champion their own view of the character as the correct one, disregarding the need for evidence.

- **Belief in elves and fairies**

Any argument concerning belief cancels out the need for evidence, given the nature of belief itself. It is quite likely that a genuine believer knows little or nothing of the history of such belief, and would for example quote the case of the Cottingley fairies (discussed in chapter 5) as proof for the existence of diminutive flower-fairies. Others might be very informed, having consulted scholarly sources or even original texts such as the *Leabhar Gabhála* or the *Poetic Edda*. Conflations between beings from different traditions are also common here, as belief is undeniably personal and thus arbitrary.

- **Identification with elves and fairies**

Elves and fairies might attract people who consider themselves to be different and often get involved with Neo-paganism and have other 'alternative' interests. Mamatas calls the Otherkin 'both sign and portent of a widespread dissatisfaction with the modern world', and relates that,

As kids, many say, they felt out of place in this world, even insisting to their parents that they were adopted. By their late teens, most Otherkin were involved in paganism, fantasy fiction, the Internet, or past-life regression. Once they 'awakened' to their true nature, the next step was to hit listservs, chat rooms, and Web sites, looking for the others.³⁵

v. *Elf-belief today*

Otherkin, Neo-pagans, Fantasy fans and gamers seek solace in an archaic world to escape from the mundane, industrialised one: this does not necessarily mean that they are not humans, only that they do not consider modern life to be desirable, while their points of view are unavoidably contemporary. As in many fictions represented in this thesis, elves have become protectors of a natural lifestyle, albeit both the image of the elf and the concept of the 'natural' are significantly products of the contemporary world. While aliens are incarnations of a similar figure equipped with technology and belonging to the future, elves represent the ancient, unchanging, and inevitably historical past of belief, whether this can be verified or not. It is common that elf-believers consider their particular version to be historically verified: the function of the character is to be unchanging, and an imagined continuum is desired and often projected. The perception of elves by Fantasy fans would be informed by their reading, which can be very diverse. Tolkien fans with a particular appreciation of elves would not necessarily know much of elves in folklore and mythology; neither would for example a reader of Christopher Paolini also necessarily be a reader of Tolkien. Neo-pagans do not tend to be avid readers of Tolkien, at least partly because he does not make use of older beliefs. The Neo-pagans consulted by Harvey name Pratchett, not Tolkien, as their favourite source of elf-lore in Fantasy literature, with the argument that Tolkien 'contributed little of value to feminists'.³⁶ However, *elf* is now a cultural signifier, and in that sense it is different from *fairy*. The problem is of course that elf and fairy mean different things for

³⁵ Mamatas, 'Elven Like Me'.

³⁶ Graham Harvey, 'Boggarts and Books: Towards an Appreciation of Pagan Spirituality', in Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman, eds, *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 155-68 (pp. 157-58 and p. 166).

different people, and this is why clashes regarding authenticity are common. Being able to quote mythology and folklore would add to your 'authenticity' as an elf, but this kind of cultural group would be quite likely to have an 'anything goes' attitude. Quoting Tolkien, another Fantasy writer, a role-playing game or website would not ostracise you from the group: scholarly knowledge and popular culture are not differentiated, elf-knowledge is for all and any source as good as the next. That the Otherkin belief has no source and no core text is unimportant:

The medium itself is no longer identifiable as such, and the confusion of the medium and the message (McLuhan) is the first great formula of this new era. There is no longer a medium in the literal sense: it is now intangible, diffused, and diffracted in the real, and one can no longer even say that the medium is altered by it.³⁷

The seemingly universal interest in things 'Celtic' in the Neo-pagan community, an interest not depending on geographical location or genetic or cultural origin, clearly demonstrates the need for a past: the 'Celtic' is genuine, and the efforts of Yeats, Wilde, and others to promote 'folk' traditions at the turn of the last century is conflated with medieval texts. Baudrillard comments on the contemporary desire for history that

We require a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin, which reassures us about our end.³⁸

This is a major criterion for what an elf or fairy is: it is historicised, or at least the attempt has been made to historicise it. In accordance with Baudrillard's concept of simulacra, the continuum that is referred to by quoting historical texts exists only in the minds of the modern, urban, computer literate population. Elves are sighted no more in the modern world, with one significant exception: Iceland.

vi. *Huldufolk*

³⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser [1981] (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 30.

³⁸ Baudrillard, p. 10.

The Gentry-type is in modern Iceland called *Huldufolk*, 'Hidden Folk', as *álfur* now refers to a small being. Huldufolk is the type of supernatural being that is most commonly seen and according to a 1998 newspaper poll, over half of the population believe in them.³⁹ The Icelanders know how to cash in on this living elf belief: there is an Elf school (*Álfaskólinn*) in Reykjavik and a popular outing is the Hidden Worlds tour of the town of Hafnarfjörður.⁴⁰ The director of the Icelandic Elf school is the amateur folklorist Magnús Skarphéðinsson, who says that the Huldufolk are human in appearance but can be discerned by their outdated clothing.⁴¹ They claim to live in a parallel dimension and usually appear to aid humans in need, but are generally wary of humans and in particular their destruction of the environment, which they are also subject to.⁴² One witness, Hermundur Rosinkrans, reports meeting a Huldufolk looking quite like any human, except somewhat transparent and able to communicate telepathically.⁴³ Most of these features are in other places in the world associated with aliens rather than elves, not because of a difference in the experience of the encounter, but because of a change in the interpretation of the being. Because the elf has a history, the experience of it should be a historical one: it should feel old-fashioned, like something read in a fairy tale. Most real-life encounters are, however, not of that sort. Robert Kirk reported for example on astral bodies and doppelgangers in 1691, and beings of light and glowing balls are also frequently reported, notwithstanding the similarities in physical appearance between popular images of elves as beings with slanted eyes, triangular faces and androgynous bodies, and the 'little grey men' who are the most commonly reported form of

³⁹ Claire Smith, 'The Land of the Hidden People', *Fortean Times* 201 (September 2005), 42-7 (p. 45); Hafstein, 'The Elves' Point of View', p. 87.

⁴⁰ For the Icelandic Elf School, see Magnús H. Skarphéðinsson, 'Álfa-og huldufólksvefurinn í umsjá Álfaskólans og Álfasögusafnsins', <<http://web.archive.org/web/19990908234540/www.hi.is/~magnussk/alfavefurinn.html>>, accessed 24 June 2010, published 18 February 1999; for the Hidden Worlds tour, see 'Elves: the Hidden World', accessed from <http://www.hafnarfjordur.is/english/read_more/?cat_id=3&ew_0_a_id=6226>, 24 June 2010, published 22 November 2005.

⁴¹ Smith, p. 45.

⁴² Smith, p. 45.

⁴³ Smith, p. 47.

alien.⁴⁴ Rojcewicz notes the problem of observing non-human beings as they are not ‘things’ per se: ‘Because we are not trained to see “no-things,” we do not see accurately, or nothing at all.’⁴⁵ If we have decided on what an elf or a fairy looks and acts like, we will not call a being elf or fairy until our predefined criteria have been fulfilled. While modern Fantasy fans and gamers might perceive the elf to be of the Gentry-type, most people will see it as a small being, and would therefore not consider something appearing like a Huldufolk to be one but might instead call it an alien, an angel, a demon, a human, or see nothing whatsoever. While aliens are often attributed with technology and associated with the future, they are, like the Huldufolk, wary of human expansion and their destruction of the environment. The Huldufolk demonstrate this by sabotaging road building: in the Reykjavik suburb of Kópavogur this went to such lengths that the mound that they live in was given its own postal address, 102 Álfhólsvegur (‘Elf Hill Road’), which was the subject of the 2006 documentary film *Huldufolk 102*.⁴⁶ The same phenomenon has been observed albeit on a smaller scale in Perthshire, Scotland where a housing development was refused planning permission because it would have entailed bulldozing a fairy rock, a decision reporters joked was based on ‘MacFeng shui’.⁴⁷ The difference between Huldufolk - indeed elves and fairies in general - and aliens is that they refuse modernity. Hafstein calls the elf-belief in Iceland ‘multivalent’ and mostly concerned with the very rapid modernisation of the country: in this case, modernity does not exclude belief.⁴⁸ It seems that the Significant Other, both in elf and alien guise, is dependent on the same earth as humans, independent of possible magical powers, and indeed the humans themselves.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Kirk, pp. 5-6 and pp. 8-9; see also the reports by Evans-Wentz in chapter 2.

⁴⁵ Rojcewicz, ‘Between One Eye Blink and the Next’, pp. 486-87.

⁴⁶ *Huldufolk 102*, Nisha Inalsingh, dir., Middle Link, 2006.

⁴⁷ Marina Warner, ‘Introduction’, in Kirk, pp. vii-xl (p. vii).

⁴⁸ Hafstein, ‘The Elves’ Point of View’, p. 96.

⁴⁹ Rojcewicz, pp. 492-93; Smith, p. 45.

Conclusion: The Significant Other

Elves might not be seen at all anymore, or be very much present in the modern world, depending on what you perceive an elf to be. There will indeed always be a place for the Significant Other, both in the mundane world and the fictional one. As long as the delimitations of what is 'same' and 'inside' society remain unchanged, there will be need to imagine the 'Other' and the 'outside'. While elf has always been considered as exterior, whether belonging to its own Otherworld or stalking the outskirts of human society like the ballad elf, that it is now attributed with technology and seen to originate on another planet says more about human development than elvish. Magic has been banished from modern society and is now mostly associated with an anachronistic sentimentality popular with neo-Pagans, Fantasy readers and fans of folklore. The Gentry-type of elf is no longer suitable for that kind of context as it cannot be simplified into only the stock Fantasy elf or being of belief: the function of the being is much greater. The Significant Other now appears in its most natural form as it is not subject to a generalised interpretation as one figure but can instead be called elf, fairy, alien, vampire, or something else entirely. This has created a multitude of possible shapes, something which is indeed its strength. In chapter 12 I mentioned the character of Elric of Melniboné as demonstrative of the problem of featuring a being that looks and acts much like the popular image of the elf in modern Fantasy and claiming that it is not an elf. Elric is not an elf; nor are the Vulcans of *Star Trek*, despite notable similarities. Many other Fantasy and SF writers have tried to feature similar beings and found that elf-parallels were made despite their efforts. Tolkien's Eldar are not elves: his meaning of Elf was his alone and he certainly did not mean for them to be conflated with the being of mythology and folklore. Likewise did the creators of *Elfquest* go to great lengths to minimise reasons for conflating their elves with anyone else's. By distinguishing a particular elf from another, writers, artists and other creators have changed the popular image of the elf.

All of these are, however, examples of the Significant Other, who might or might not be called elf. It remains one of the most useful fictional characters and the meeting with the Other one of the most popular plotlines. Limiting the character by giving it the name elf would hamper its future use but the being itself will remain: as long as what we perceive as interior, familiar and mundane is categorised as human there is a chance that Otherness will be made exterior, but the Significant Other will inevitably remain attached to us.

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